

The Digging Season

Photo | Frome 2023

Rook Lane Chapel, Frome June 24 – July 12 2023

Peat has been mined in Somerset since the Roman occupation, and thereafter successive authorities have been determined to drain, shore-up, and otherwise 'improve' what is England's largest wetland. The desiccation of the Somerset Levels has released millions of tons of CO₂ that had built up over the past seven thousand years or so. This story is devastatingly similar to that of peatlands and wetlands around the world. Healthy bogs can sequester carbon on colossal scales, but when they dry out, stored carbon decomposes and they become net producers of greenhouse gasses. Globally, wetlands and bogs are currently releasing around 2 billion tons of CO₂ annually and have a severe impact on climate change.

Whilst peat has accumulated across the millennia on the Somerset Levels, the anaerobic conditions have preserved artefacts that would otherwise have rotted. The Somerset Levels and Moors have revealed a wealth of information about the earliest farming communities who settled there around 6,000 years ago. Many artefacts are archaeologically unique and provide an understanding of ancient cultures that we would otherwise be ignorant of.

Topographic photographs of the final throes of the peat mining industry are presented alongside artefacts that were discovered in the process of peat cutting. Illustrations of contemporary objects (inspired by line drawings made in the 1970s and '80s by the Somerset Levels Project who were responsible for much of the archaeological fieldwork on the Levels) allude towards future possibilities for this beguiling place – whether they are positive or bleak. Made in collaboration with landscape architect Jenny Hyden, the 'show bog' approximates a wet healthy raised bog, as would have covered much of the Somerset Levels, had they remained untouched.

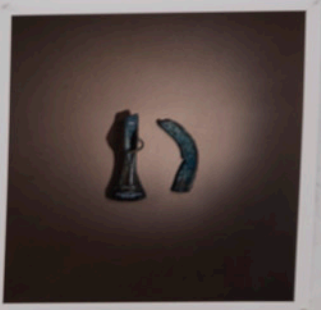
The project has been made possible thanks to the support of the South West Heritage Trust who generously granted access to their collections and assisted with research. These photographs have been printed on Somerset® Photo fine art inkjet paper, kindly provided by St. Cuthbert's Mill. Based just outside Wells, St. Cuthbert's Mill are world renowned papermakers, experts in creating watercolour, printmaking and fine art inkjet papers and have been operating since the 1700s. The mill uses unprocessed water directly from the River Axe which filters through the Mendip Hills – the same source that feeds the Somerset Levels and Moors.

The Digging Season is part of an ongoing exploration of the Levels, and the intersections of history, industry and ecology.

www.jessealexander.co.uk

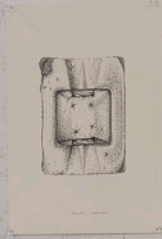


Hyxander
Amazing Compost
ETS



- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Eriophorum angustifolium</i> | Cotton grass |
| <i>Paspalum urvillei</i> | Meadowsweet |
| <i>Lotus corniculatus</i> | Water violet |
| <i>Lychnis viscaria</i> | Yellow flag iris |
| <i>Lychnis viscaria</i> | Regged robin |
| <i>Mentha aquatica</i> | Water mint |
| <i>Menyanthes trifoliata</i> | Bogbean |
| <i>Comandra virginica</i> | Royal fern |
| <i>Ranunculus flammula</i> | Lesser spearwort |
| <i>Sphagnum sp.</i> | Spaghnum bog moss |





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Small white text label below the landscape photograph.



A rolled-up document or map resting on a wooden cart.

A small white card or brochure resting on a wooden cart.

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PHOTO FROME

Jesse Alexander / The Digging Season

After the onset of winter in the River Country, the muddy paths and canals that have been dug out of the earth are a stark contrast to the dry, cracked earth of the summer months. The water in the canals is a dark, almost black color, reflecting the overcast sky. The surrounding landscape is a mix of dry grass and bare trees, suggesting a late autumn or early winter setting. The overall mood is one of quiet desolation and the passage of time.

The photograph captures a narrow, muddy path that has been dug out of the earth, leading towards a body of water. The path is flanked by high, dark banks, and the water in the canal is a deep, dark color. The sky is a pale, overcast blue, and the surrounding landscape is a mix of dry grass and bare trees, suggesting a late autumn or early winter setting.

The photograph is a landscape shot, capturing a narrow, muddy path that has been dug out of the earth, leading towards a body of water. The path is flanked by high, dark banks, and the water in the canal is a deep, dark color. The sky is a pale, overcast blue, and the surrounding landscape is a mix of dry grass and bare trees, suggesting a late autumn or early winter setting.

SW | BY CORNELL WELLS | BALDWIN | 30 |

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Map of the area around the house, showing the river and the fields. The map is a hand-drawn sketch on a light-colored background.



Photograph of the ceramic vessel, showing its shape and the inscription on its surface.





Small text caption below the map, likely describing the drawing or the location it represents.



Small text caption below the photograph of the house, likely providing details about the building or the scene.



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SMART







Don't Drive, Wetland Week, April 2010

Since the 1980s, environmental activists and other parts of the public have been organizing to protect wetlands. In 2010, the National Wetlands Conference was held in Washington, D.C. The conference was a major event for the wetlands community and brought together people from across the country to discuss the importance of wetlands and how to protect them. The conference was held at the National Mall and was attended by thousands of people. The conference was a success and helped to raise awareness of the importance of wetlands.



Beaver hat pelt and bone, England, 1600-1700 AD

In 1600 a beaver of 10 years old, medium size, was killed and a hat was made from its pelt. The hat was made from the beaver's skin and was worn by the beaver's owner. The hat was made from the beaver's skin and was worn by the beaver's owner. The hat was made from the beaver's skin and was worn by the beaver's owner.

