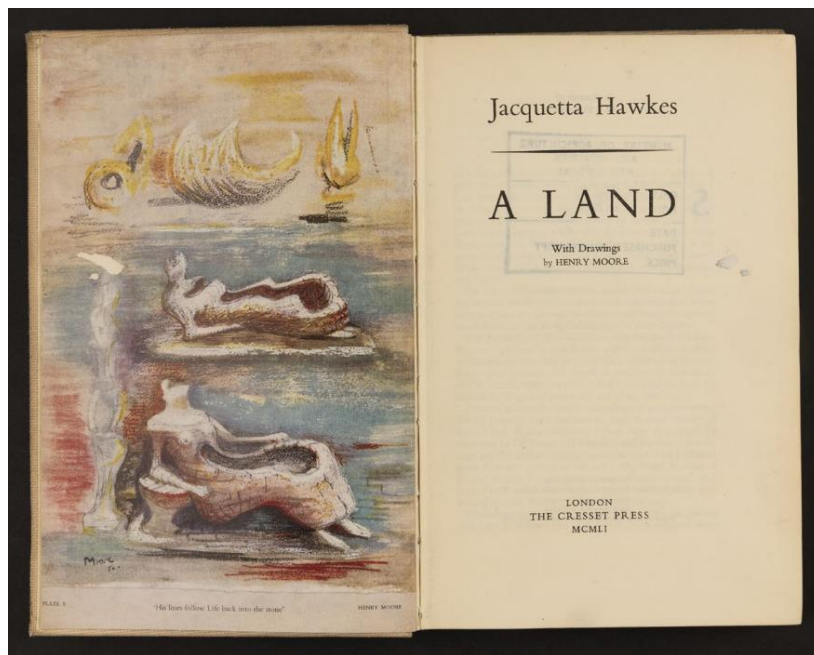


13. A Land

In this piece, the brilliant Dr Amara Thornton shares her reflections on the 1951 work of trowel blazer Jacquetta Hawkes, who played a major role in presenting prehistory and landscape at the Festival of Britain. In doing so, Amara recontextualises an archaeological narrative—A Land—and reveals it as part of a Britain actively reshaped by post-war change.

Jacquetta Hawkes, A Land (London: Cresset Press, 1951)



Frontispiece and title page of Hawkes' A Land, featuring a sketch by Henry Moore (MERL Library 1840-HAW)

Jacquetta Hawkes' Festival Lands

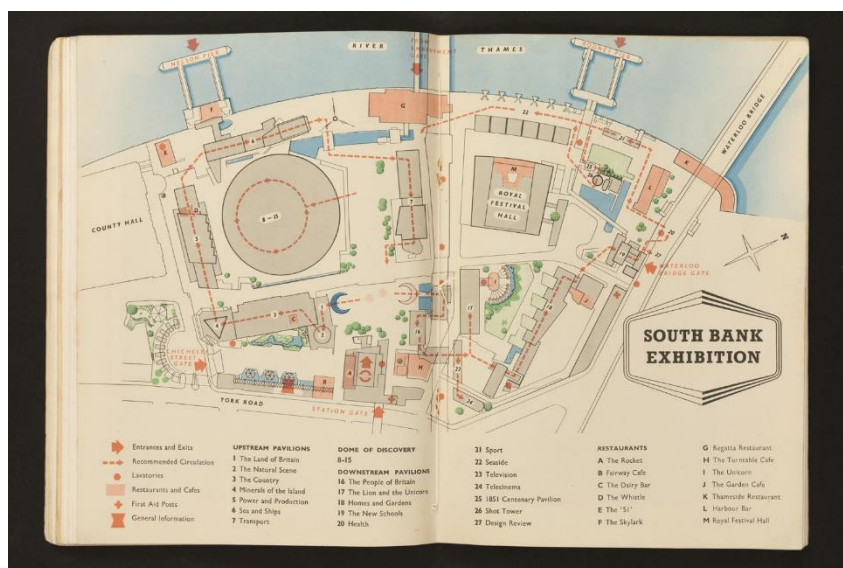
Published a month after the opening of the Festival of Britain, Jacquetta Hawkes' book A Land (1951) has been said to compliment her work as "Theme Convenor" for the Festival's People of Britain pavilion. Her exploration of British archaeology and geography was writ large through the physical display, the introductory section to the Festival's "Downstream Circuit". This part of the Festival defined 'Britain' through the artefacts in its landscape, its attitudes, literature, society, culture, sport, and technological innovations. Hawkes' book, and her pavilion, were focused on the deep history of the British Isles, emerging from the landscape through the painstaking process of excavation and interpretation. She is now primarily remembered for her engagement with and ruminations on Britain and its archaeology. This included a BBC Radio series in 1935 entitled "Ancient Britain Out of Doors", subsequently published in The Listener, and her books Prehistoric Britain (1943, co-authored with husband Christopher Hawkes) and Early Britain (1945) before the publication of A Land (followed later in 1951 by her Guide to the Prehistoric Monuments of England and Wales). But both

Jacquetta Hawkes and the Festival she worked on emerged from, were shaped by, and reflected Britain's still imperial present.



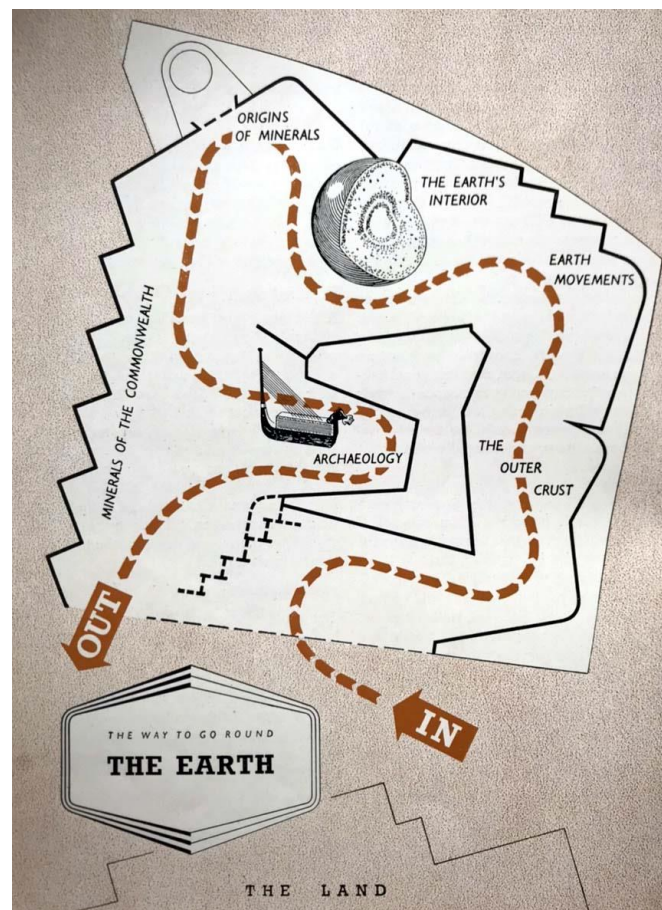
The cover of Hawkes' *Early Britain*, from the Collins Britain In Pictures series, with a cover featuring the iconic Uffington White Horse (Britain In Pictures Collection 092).

Looking more closely at Festival ephemera reveals that the event was essentially composed of three sections, and that the theme of "Land" was incorporated into all of them. Visitors were advised to navigate the Festival in a particular order, beginning with the "Upstream Circuit", and progressing through the "Dome of Discovery" to the "Downstream Circuit". The "Upstream Circuit", Festival Director of Science Ian Cox explained in the *Daily Mail's* guide, reflected how people interacted with the British landscape, while the "Downstream Circuit" highlighted how land in Britain shaped people's lives. Between and in a sense bridging these two Circuits was the Dome, where British achievements in science (broadly defined), much of it taking place outside Britain in the Empire and relatively newly constituted Commonwealth, was on show.



The main centrefold South Bank site map from the *Exhibition Guide* (MERL Library 1770-COX)

The circular Dome dominated the Festival grounds being larger than most if not all of the other Festival buildings on the Southbank site. The aluminium structure of the Dome building was supported by massive concrete blocks, likened to a contemporary Stonehenge. Inside, visitors entered the ground floor where the section on "The Land" charted the history of developments in British surveying, water engineering, agriculture, tropical medicine and communications that were made possible through the colonial expansion of Empire. Adjoining it, "The Earth" (a section organised by the metallurgist Sonia Withers), revealed the history of British geology and the extraction of mineral wealth, and cultural wealth in the form of archaeological artefacts from the lands of the Empire. Four ancient cities – Mohenjodaro, situated in then newly established Pakistan; Ur in Iraq, which had during a brief period after the First World War been administered by Britain under a Mandate; Jericho, located in Palestine, another former British Mandate territory; and Knossos, on Crete, represented British archaeological triumphs at the Festival.

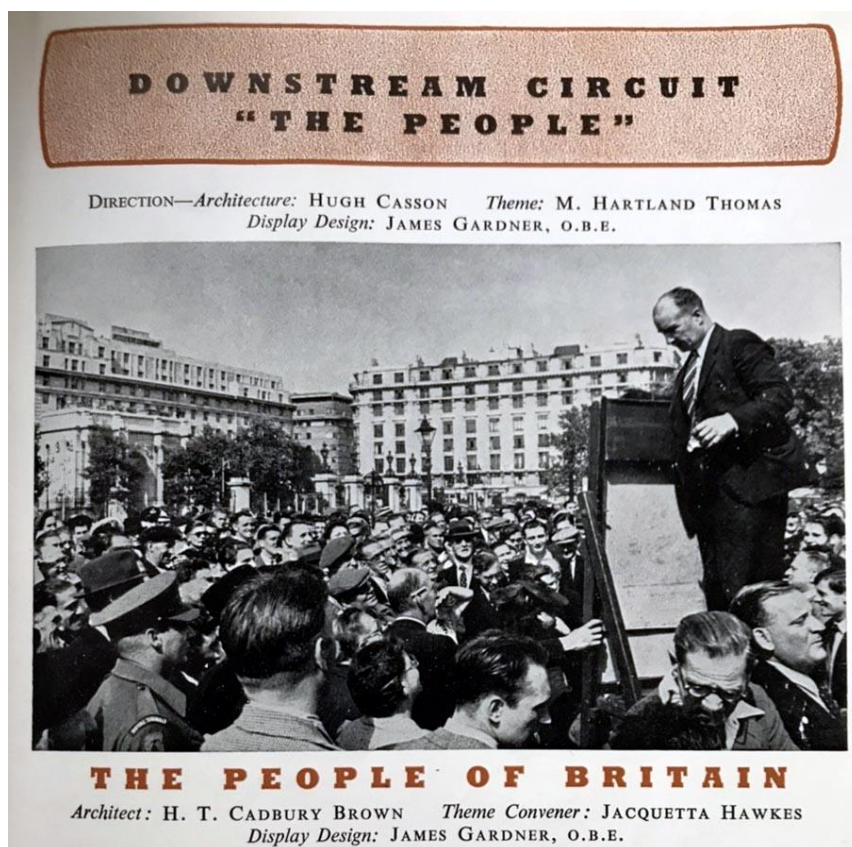


Plan of "The Earth" section of the Dome, featuring archaeology towards the centre (MERL Library 1770-COX).

This narrative of British archaeological discovery in imperial contexts was part of Hawkes's personal history too. Fresh from Cambridge in 1933, Jacquetta Hopkins had joined the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem to work on Dorothy Garrod's excavations at Mount Carmel. The School, then just over a decade old, had been established as Palestine came under British control at the close of the First World War. Working with Garrod alongside many other women, a few British but the

majority Palestinian, including Yusra, a skilled excavator now credited with the discovery of Tabun-1, a Neanderthal skull specimen, Hawkes had helped to uncover an important Neanderthal skeleton.

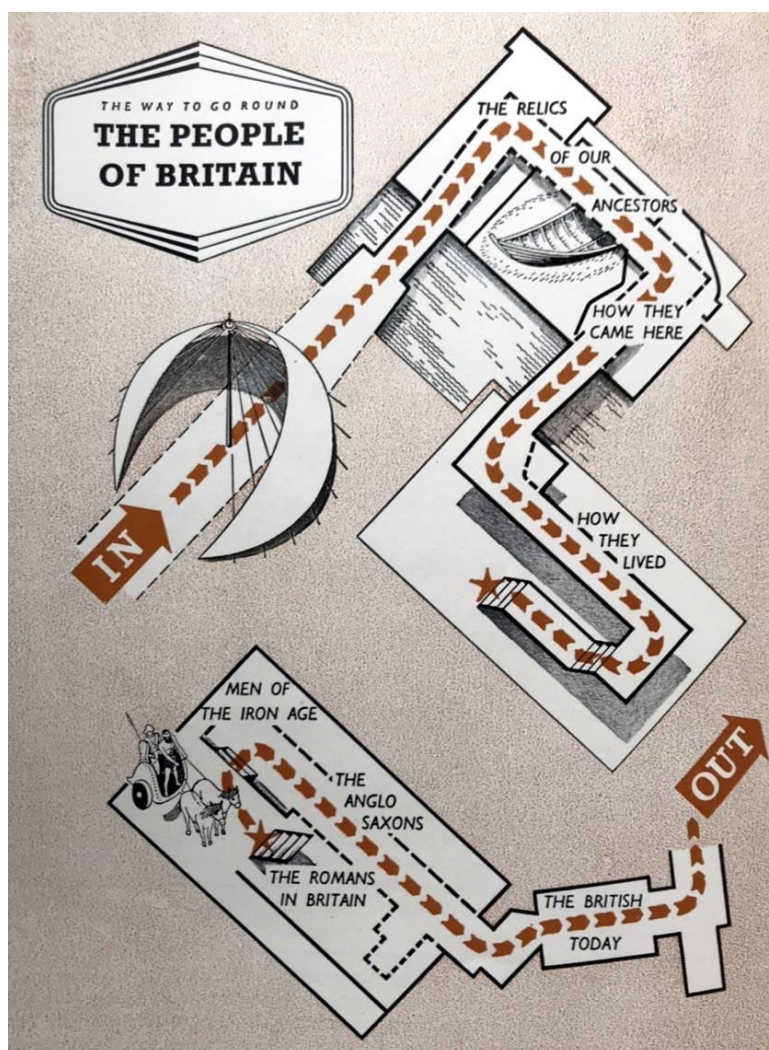
On her return to Britain, she married fellow archaeologist Christopher Hawkes, whom she had met as part of the team excavating the Romano-British site of Colchester before going out to Palestine. She began a more public facing role in the communication of archaeology through her 1935 BBC talks, aimed at the walking public interested in augmenting their encounters with ancient remains in the British landscape with extra information. This series of three programmes began with her own discussion on the practice of archaeology in Britain. This was followed by her interviews on the key landscape features of British archaeology before and after the Roman period with two other archaeologists: her contemporaries Stuart Piggott and John Nowell Linton Myres. All told, the three talks show British archaeology to be a history of (mainly civilizing) inward immigration leading progressive development in Britain, with a specific parallel drawn in the final interview with Myres to a more recent outward history of empire building, through colonial acquisition.



Credits for "The People of Britain", as featured in the South Bank Exhibition guide (MERL Library 1770-COX).

The section Hawkes coordinated for the Festival continued the themes Hawkes had introduced in her BBC Radio series. Serving as the introduction to the "Downstream Circuit", "The People of Britain" exhibition featured the highlights of British archaeology. In a special article for the *Daily Mail*, Hawkes discussed more specifically the themes she integrated into "The People of Britain", which shows in part how archaeology reflects successive waves of immigration to Britain from Europe in the

past. As a dramatic entrance to the main pavilion, objects were arranged to reflect discovery in situ, including a prehistoric burial, a Bronze Age gold necklace, and a Roman mosaic floor. These led to the recreated ship burial of a warrior at Sutton Hoo, which had been discovered on the eve of war twelve years before. The main pavilion charted this progressive history of ancient immigration through chronological half-life size dioramas, spread across two levels, at the end of which was information about where visitors could find relevant artefacts in museums, and how they could see ancient remains for themselves in the British landscape. The final room, "The British Today" led out toward the pavilions on British contemporary society.



Plan of "The People of Britain" pavilion, which ended with 'The British Today' (MERL Library 1770-COX).

Although trumpeted both at the time and today as a Festival that looked to the future, the inspiration for the Festival was a century of large-scale exhibitions, at the root of which was the Great Exhibition of 1851. The Great Exhibition featured displays not only of 'British' art, produce, minerals and manufactured items, but also countries within the Empire and outside it. Other exhibitions followed; in 1886 the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, a descendent of the Great Exhibition, saw raw and manufactured goods and produce, as well as art, artefacts, and displayed peoples from Britain's now

expanded Empire, brought together in South Kensington. Then in 1924 and 1925 the British Empire Exhibitions in Wembley again featured art, artefacts, natural and manufactured items, as well as displayed peoples alongside British goods. Archaeology was incorporated into displays in the Palestine pavilion, for example, with visitors encouraged to arrange their trips to this (British administered) country where, among other things, they could see (frequently British-led) excavations at sites primed for tourists in situ. On display too was a recreation of the tomb of Tutankhamun, a by that point internationally famous new discovery made in the Valley of the Kings in Luxor and credited to the British archaeologist Howard Carter.

The lands of Hawkes' book, her Festival display, and the Festival as a whole are much more than what they seem at first glance to be. In 1951, 'Britain' was beginning to re-make itself in a post-imperial image, and British archaeology in the UK was emerging into the limelight from the shadow of British archaeology overseas. Hawkes's focus on the archaeology of Britain, and what made the British British should be understood within the wider imperial context that created Hawkes the (public) archaeologist, and the Festival. As it was being put together, new citizen-migrants from the Empire were beginning to make their home in Britain on a much larger scale than ever before. One of them, the Trinidadian calypso singer-songwriter Lord Kitchener (Aldwyn Roberts), who had arrived in Britain on the Empire Windrush three years earlier, commemorated the Festival in song. But with the Festival opening, the process of forgetting had begun.

Further Information (online):

For information about A Land – [MERL Library 1840-HAW](#)

For information about the Britain In Pictures Collection (which included Hawkes' Early Britain) – [BRITAIN IN PICTURES COLLECTION](#)

For more information about the Empire Windrush see these resources produced by our Museums Partnership Reading colleagues at Reading Museum – <https://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/explore/online-exhibitions/windrush-day-22-june>

Read more by Dr Amara Thornton on her blog or find out more about her work via her website– <https://www.readingroomnotes.com/> / <https://www.amarathornton.com/>

An exhibition by Amara Thornton exploring Caribbean archaeology at the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition and links to Reading's Barbadian community – <https://collections.reading.ac.uk/explore/online-exhibitions/mapping-collections-histories-barbados-and-britain/>

For more on the Festival and Lord Kitchener see this film –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Vmzq1s7xgE>

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