

May 2026



Dear Club Members,

It's thirty years since the death of Jacquetta Hawkes in 1996. She was one of the most influential British archaeologists and public intellectuals of the twentieth century. Known for her interdisciplinary approach and highly literary style, she played a significant role in bringing archaeology and ancient history to a wider audience. Her work combined scientific understanding with reflections on landscape, culture, philosophy, and human experience, helping to reshape public perceptions of archaeology in post-war Britain.

Born in 1910 in Cambridge, Hawkes was the first woman to study Archaeology & Anthropology at University of Cambridge, graduating with a first class honours titular degree (Cambridge only began awarding women full degrees in 1948). She developed an early interest in prehistoric Britain and quickly established herself through both academic research and public writing.

After graduation in 1932, she travelled to Palestine and joined the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem, working on an excavation on Mount Carmel, alongside Yusra and Dorothy Garrod. There she supervised the excavation of a Neanderthal skeleton.

In 1934 she published her first article "Aspects of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods in western Europe" in *Antiquity*. The same year, she visited a seven-year-old David Attenborough's "museum" of fossils and geology, donating specimens to it.

During World War II Hawkes worked as a civil servant in London, first moving items from the British Museum to Aldwich Tube Station during the Blitz. She then became Assistant Principal of the Post-War Reconstruction Secretariat. Her next post, begun in 1943 and one she held until 1949, was in the Ministry of Education, where she became Secretary of the UK National Committee for UNESCO. In her work in the Ministry of Education she was editor-in-chief of the film unit, where she commissioned and produced *The Beginning of History* - an early attempt to present prehistory on film.

Whilst working for the government she continued to publish, including *Prehistoric Britain* (1944, co-authored with her then husband, Christopher Hawkes), and *Early Britain* (1945). *Prehistoric Britain* was used by many students in the 1940s and 1950s and underwent several editions and reprints. It was at UNESCO's first conference, which was held in Mexico City in 1947 that she met and fell in love with her next husband, writer, J. B. Priestley.

After leaving the civil service one of her first creative projects was as archaeological advisor to the Festival of Britain in 1951, where she produced the 'People of Britain' pavilion. The vision of the pavilion created by Hawkes showed archaeological sites as if they were being discovered for the first time, proceeding chronologically from a prehistoric burial, to a Bronze Age gold necklace, to a Roman mosaic floor. After the Roman section, visitors met a recreation of the Sutton Hoo ship burial.

The following month saw the release of her most celebrated publication, "A Land" (published May 1951), is widely regarded as a landmark work of cultural and environmental writing. The book examines the history of United Kingdom through geology, archaeology, mythology, and literature, presenting the British landscape as the product of both natural processes and human activity across millennia. Its distinctive prose style and broad intellectual scope have ensured its enduring reputation.

Hawkes is best known for her ability to communicate complex archaeological and historical ideas in an accessible yet intellectually sophisticated manner. Rather than presenting archaeology solely as a technical or scientific field, she emphasised its connection to human identity, memory, and the natural environment. This perspective distinguished her work from many of her contemporaries and contributed to the growing public interest in archaeology during the mid-twentieth century.

In addition to her books, Hawkes contributed extensively to public education through essays, lectures, radio broadcasts, and television appearances. Following the Second World War, she became an important figure in efforts to make historical and archaeological knowledge more accessible to the general public. She believed that studying the distant past could provide valuable insight into contemporary society and humanity's relationship with the environment.

Hawkes's interests extended beyond archaeology into art, religion, psychology, and philosophy. She rejected rigid academic boundaries and argued that understanding human civilisation required a synthesis of scientific and cultural perspectives. This interdisciplinary approach anticipated many later developments in cultural history and environmental humanities. In the late 1950's she was one of the founding members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and active in the campaign to decriminalise gay sex as a founder member of the Homosexual Law Reform Society. She remained active in archaeological and in In 1971, Hawkes was elected vice-president of the Council for British Archaeology in recognition of her life's work.

Today, Jacquetta Hawkes is remembered as a pioneering figure who expanded the scope of archaeological writing and public engagement with history. Her work continues to influence archaeologists, historians, and writers interested in landscape, memory, and the long relationship between people and place.

Your fibre this month is inspired by one of her particular interests; the Minoan culture of Crete. Her research suggested that women when played an unusually large role in Minoan public institutions. She used evidence from art to argue that the society was matriarchal: "the absence of these manifestations of the all-powerful male ruler that are so widespread at this time and in this stage of cultural development as to be almost universal, is one of the reasons for supposing that the occupants of Minoan thrones may have been queens". Your fibre takes inspiration from this beautiful art, and also the value that the Minoan culture placed on gold.

Happy Spinning

Katie

Fibre Content- In case your parcel is missing the label

13% Baby Alpaca,
25% Bamboo Rayon,
4% Stellinga,
58% Superfine Merino

Further Reading/Watching-

The Jacquetta Hawkes archive is held at the University of Bradford

<https://www.bradford.ac.uk/library/special-collections/our-collections/collections/jacquetta-hawkes-archive/>

A review of A Land which was republished in 2012

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/may/11/rereading-a-land-jacquetta-hawkes>

Her appearance on Desert Island Discs

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p009mvpr>

Her life as an archaeologist

<https://trowelblazers.com/2014/05/09/jacquetta-hawkes-rewriting-the-prehistory-books/>

Minoan Art

<https://www.visualflood.com/article/history-of-art-minoan-art>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bull-Leaping_Fresco