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IN MEMORIAM: DAVID NEVILLE HALL (1938–2021)

By BILL FRANKLIN[1]

David Hall died on Sunday 1st August 2021 at Hinchingbrooke Hospital, Huntingdon, following a major stroke. An energetic landscape archaeologist and historian with a career spanning more than 30 years, he continued to research and write up to three days before his death.

David was born in Raunds, Northamptonshire, and grew up with his younger brother Richard at the Gas House, Wollaston, where their father was manager of the village gasworks. From at least the age of ten years, David had a keen eye for the landscape. The surrounding meadows and fields, rich in wildflowers, fostered his love of the natural world. It was here too that he began mapping the landscape, drawing maps and recording bird nesting sites. He came to further appreciate the landscape and agricultural history during his schooldays and, later, during university holidays which were spent working in the harvest fields of Strixton, a small hamlet next to Wollaston.

It was during David's university years that he began to take a serious interest in archaeology and history, carrying out his first excavation at Strixton. At one point Sheppard Frere, the distinguished Romanist, took tea at the Gas House to help identify pottery finds. After reading chemistry at St Peter's College, Oxford, David returned to Northamptonshire and took up a post with Unilever Research at Colworth, just over the border in Bedfordshire.

In the years that followed, with work colleagues plus farming and other friends, he undertook excavations at church, manorial and burial sites. Were it not for David's keen eye and doggedness, a number of sites across Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire would have been destroyed by developers or gravel extraction; such sites included Raunds Furnells, Radwell gravel pits, the interior of Thurleigh and other churches in the vicinity, and Irchester manor house. With a trusty team of loyal friends, excavations continued into the 1970s.

The chance discovery of a sixteenth-century open field strip map of Strixton eventually led him to devote the rest of his life to fieldwork and – by teaching himself to read medieval Latin – documentary study too. By 1977 he had published his first book, Wollaston, Portrait of a Village, which embodied his passion for both fieldwork and, as he called it, 'sifting through documents'.

As well as researching the history of Northamptonshire and leading excavations, David also undertook fieldwalking in the winter months (Fig. 1). In 1972, while working with the Brixworth Archaeological Research Committee, he met Paul Martin, who had for some time been walking the fields of that parish. For the next 25 years, they would spend their weekends

Figure 1 David fieldwalking in the 1970s, with his characteristic long scarf, clipboard and pencil. Reproduced by kind permission of Ruth Hall.

fieldwalking every parish in Northamptonshire and some beyond. Paul later recalled that 'David was a person who could read the landscape like no other. My many memories were always fond and even now I can remember David moaning about his pencil going blunt and trying to sharpen it with the penknife that he always carried. At lunchtimes, before our sessions in a local pub, we always ate our sandwiches together. My meagre sandwiches were nothing compared to David's slabs, always filled with either mutton or pork and always falling to bits'.

In 1976, after fourteen years in scientific research at Unilever, David was delighted to leave the corporate world behind and take up a post as Fenland Field Officer for the Cambridge Archaeological Committee. His job, Fenland Research Officer, was to survey the 142,000 hectares of the fenland landscape of Cambridgeshire. This he did with his characteristic energy and vision. David devised a plan based on the parish as the unit for study: fieldwalking over the winter and, in the summer months, undertaking documentary research, studying finds, and producing maps (Fig. 2). Wearing his customary long 'Doctor Who' scarf, David went out with his clipboard, map and pencil and noted the soils of every field he walked. He identified and mapped ancient watercourses and found a staggering number of artefacts and sites. The late Professor John Coles noted in 2002 that David had identified more than 2,500 sites of which over 2,000 were previously unknown. In 1978, funds were found to widen the scope

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Figure 2 Haddenham, Cambridgeshire. David and colleagues surveying a Bronze Age barrow cut through by a modern drainage dyke. Reproduced by kind permission of Ruth Hall.

Figure 3 David on the final day of the Bosworth survey – which was to be his last ever day of fieldwalking – in 2019. Photograph by Bill Franklin.

of the Fenland Project to include Norfolk and Lincolnshire, and David acted as both secretary and mentor to the newly appointed field officers.

The first Fenland Survey monograph was published in 1987. This was followed in 1992 and 1996 by further monographs by David, ably assisted in the interpretation of aerial photography and the production of maps by Rog Palmer. His work on the Fenland Project and its publications were to become a major and internationally admired success for English Heritage. As the late Professor John Coles was to say: 'Seldom has one individual made more impact on a particular branch of archaeology than has David Hall on Field Survey. No one has walked more miles over more fields or charmed more farmers. No one has recognised more fragments of ancient landscape surviving within the modern countryside'.

In 1990, English Heritage set up a new project to look at the lowlands of seven counties in the northwest of England. They approached David, who agreed to undertake the work using the methodology and experience he had developed in the Cambridgeshire fens.

Somehow, David also found the time to be involved in several voluntary organisations. Among the many positions he held, he was a Trustee and founder of Wollaston Heritage Society and its museum, and for nearly 40 years he served on the Northamptonshire Record Society committee, editing Past and Present as well as the Society's volumes. He was also an active member of the Medieval Settlement Research Group and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries.

Away from the work of the Fenland Project, David developed his understanding of medieval settlements and in particular their field systems, a subject about which he wrote articles for many leading archaeology and landscape journals and edited collections. He wrote many histories of local towns including Rushden and Raunds, and encouraged local historians to do the same.

Following his retirement, David was not one to be idle. Despite having a very large garden, with a vegetable patch in which he took great pride, he continued to study the fields of his beloved Northamptonshire, collaborating with Glenn Foard and Tracey Partida among others. The resulting data were, with the assistance of Tom Williamson, used in an AHRC-funded project to map the fields, settlements, woods and terrain of Northamptonshire using GIS technology. This work led to publications including *Rockingham Forest: An Atlas of the Medieval and Early-modern Landscape* (2009) and *An Atlas of Northamptonshire: The Medieval and Early-Modern Landscape* (2013).

David's magnum opus, *The Open Fields of England*, was published in 2014 by Oxford University Press. In recognition of his substantial contribution to landscape archaeology, he received an award from the British Academy and an honorary fellowship and doctorate from the University of Exeter.

I undertook excavations and fieldwalking with David between 1969 and 1975, and was fortunate to continue fieldwalking and researching with him upon my retirement in 2012. Between 2012 and 2021, we met

most weeks with another trusty friend, John Hutchings, and between 2012 and 2019 we completed field surveys in Norfolk, Oxfordshire and Essex (Fig. 3). His last survey was an extension to the survey of the area surrounding Bosworth Field for the Bosworth Battlefield Trust. Now in his 80s and becoming more frail, this was to be David's last campaign of fieldwalking. His documentary research continued, however, with regular trips to various archives around the country, and my photographing maps and other documents for later study.

David was a remarkable landscape archaeologist, and always one to play down his achievements. It was important to him to record landscapes for future generations and to gather evidence from original documents rather than rely on what others had written. Where he could help others engaged in the same field, he would do so generously and repeatedly. All those who met David, whether as colleagues or friends, remember him with respect as a loyal, gentle man with a ready sense of humour.

If the measure of a great landscape archaeologist is the number of miles covered during fieldwalking and the number of sites discovered, then David Hall must be one of the greatest, if not the greatest, landscape archaeologist ever to have lived, for I doubt that any others have or will achieve the same. And whilst his academic research remained important until the end of his life, he always spoke of his family with pride and is remembered as a loving father, brother, grandfather and husband.