

To The River: Creative Ideas for Selvedge

This proposal is for a 50m (exact length to be confirmed) long sculpture along the riverbank at Laundress Green entitled *Selvedge*. The sculpture will flow in and out and over the riverbank, subtly glinting with golden tones, etched with the design of Cambridge Lace and incorporating specially selected bio-diverse plants growing within and around the structure.

This document is about how the artist Caroline Wright reached this idea for a public artwork.

During the community engagement work from 2018-2020, the question “what exactly is the river to you?” was asked. For some the answer was emotive, ‘comfort’ and ‘calmness’ were two words that were often suggested. The river was seen as a feature of the city, one that was a place of action, fun and enjoyment, but also of peace and respite. The words flowing, moving and changing were expressed many times and it was also described as a marker, route or line that cut through the city along which walkers and cyclists chose to travel. Thus the river’s position was acknowledged as a boundary marker cutting through the land giving continuity and flow within an often busy location.

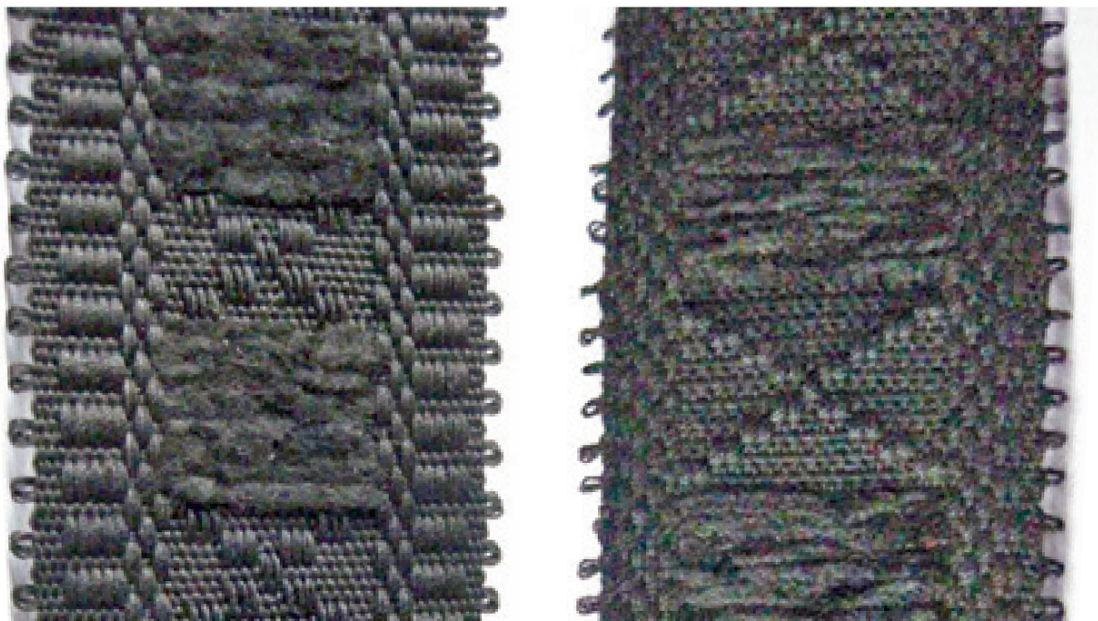
The notion of viewpoints, flow, boundary and framing, have been key considerations in the creative development of ideas. The body of river Cam water shapes our understanding of landscape through its position of the land and how it forms our navigation. Understanding natural features of the landscape, such as a river, is informed as much by the constituency of said feature as our own physical and mental perspectives on what it means to us. In the development of ideas for the permanent work, it was deemed important to recognize the relationship between land and water, and to consider the riverbank as the site for the work, given that it is a transitional site where material constituency changes and the static nature of land gives way to the ever changing river water.

Other influences that played a part in the development stage included the various connections to textiles in the city. Laundress Green, which is adjacent to where the work will be located, is so named as it was used by laundresses to wash Cambridge University laundry. The Cam was the best source of water for washing and clothes and other textiles would be laid out on the nearby grassy banks to dry in the sun. Laundress Lane takes its name from this activity. The work additionally references a short-lived wool and weaving industry (e.g. Hobsons Spinning House, 17th century) in Cambridge as well as the use of the river for trade transporting commodities including textiles and pottery to the Cambridge Fairs such as Stourbridge Fair. Cambridge Lace is used as a decoration to academic gowns, sometimes in gold depending on the use and wearer of the gown. Gold is a material used in artist Caroline Wright's practice on a regular basis, for its visual impact, for its stable and inert material qualities, value and universal recognition. Selvedge will have a golden richness in the colour of the work, with some parts being lighter and more illuminated than others in a changing visual image according to the light.



The ideas described above have formed the shape, scale, location and form of the proposed work. *Selvedge* is a three-dimensional piece formed in metal, positioned along the riverbank, dipping into the river water and folding along, up and over onto the bank - connecting land and water. The surface takes the shape of flowing ripples along, up and over the riverbank, the form reflecting ripples on the river surface. During the early phase of the project, photos taken under the river water of the riverbed at different points along the Cam show the ebbs and flows in the murky soil river base and this undulating topography was part of the design process. The artwork, shaped as though molten metal were frozen at the point where fluidity is lost, straddles the solid/fluid boundary, reflecting light on and from the river water enabling an ever changing light and perspective visual. Contrary to a fixed

image of the river water at an arrested moment in time, the work grasps and presents back the renewing and ever altering flowing water in the reflections. On the bankside, an embossed pattern of Cambridge Lace will be pressed into the metal, acknowledging the relationship of the town and its river, the history of textiles and Cambridge University, the latter which has been instrumental in the shaping of access to the river. The textured surface has the dual effect of creating a non-slip surface to the metal.

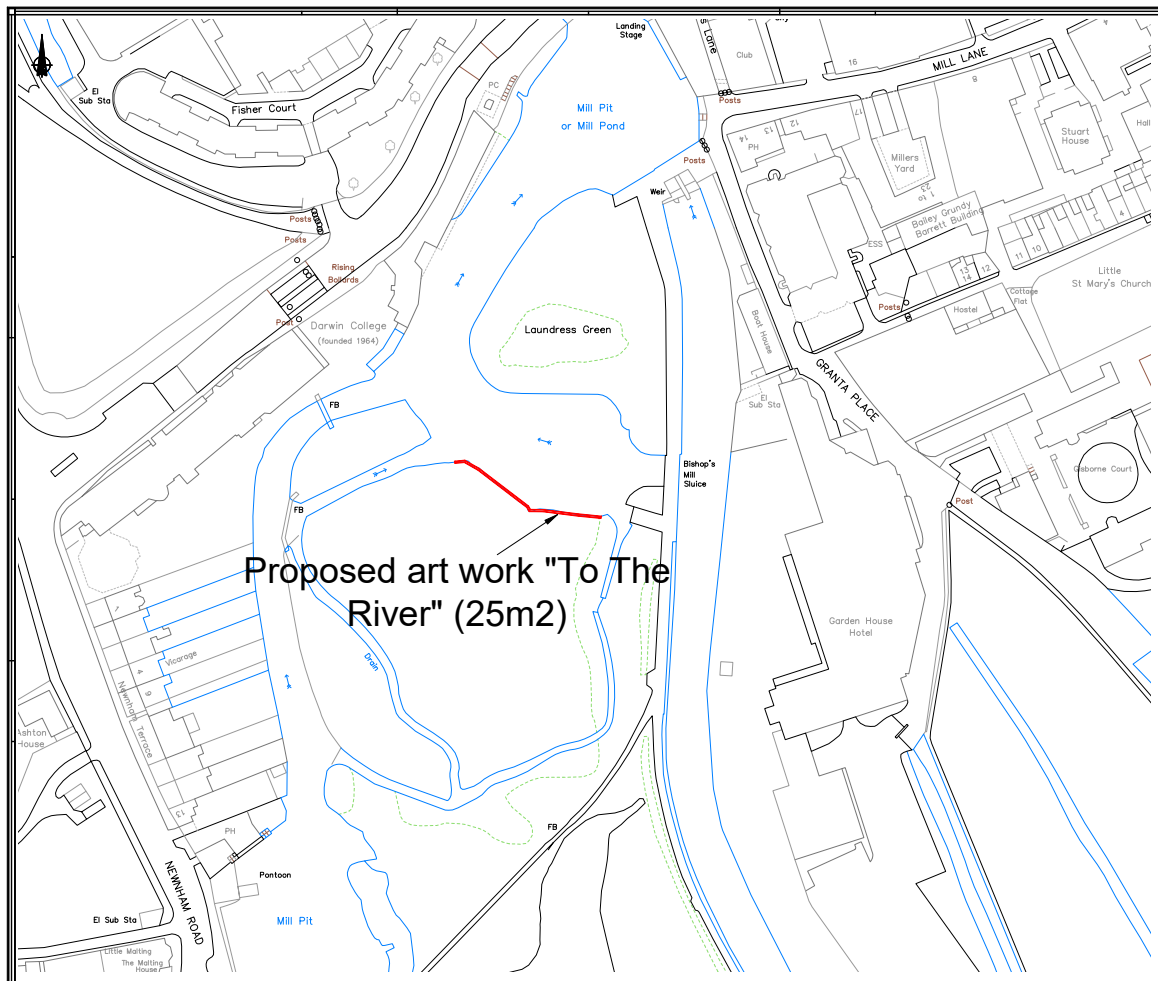


Above: Cambridge Lace

The work will be installed on the riverbank edge at Sheep's Green. Several viewpoints will come into play linking the work to the compositional approaches of artist Gwen Raverat, Darwin's granddaughter. A downloadable interactive map and publication showing details of Raverat's work and the viewpoints she chose to draw from can be found at totheriver.info, you can also find information there about research into Gwen Raverat on the project website journal pages. The work can be seen from the Darwin College Library, where in the past, Gwen Raverat could sometimes be seen sketching. It can also be viewed from the pedestrian footpath in addition to a direct view from the river itself.



Site Location and Context



Sheep's Green is situated to the west of Coe Fen and runs along the west bank of the river Cam. It is an ideal place to walk along the river and get away from the busy city streets. It is also a popular area for tourists to visit. They are adjacent to a punt station and a canoe station, bounded by a public path and near of the main Cambridge hotels. Summer evenings can see high numbers of people gathering in this area, which is also close to the central Cambridge colleges and the Fitzwilliam Museum. The multi-directional public routes give the benefit of many sightlines of the work and from reasonably close quarter. Placing the work in this green and contained area affords the work something of a stage and whilst low down in position, it will catch the eye as the metal glints in changing light conditions.'

The riverbank where the proposed artwork will be installed has recently undergone work to improve the edge of the bank. Below is an image of the bank before the work was undertaken. The original bank comprised vertical wooden cladding bolted onto retained sheet piling. You will notice that wooden cladding is higher than the top of the steel piling. It had become dangerous with numerous gaps behind for cattle or members of the public to get their legs trapped. The Council explored the idea of removing or lowering the sheet piling to create a more natural bank. However, the erosive forces from the sluice gates are too high to allow this.



The images below show work just after removal of the timber cladding and the regrading of the bank. Some of the soil has now washed away from behind the existing steel piling. Any further bank treatment or the sculpture would raise the bank and regrade the soil back to level to prevent this.



The work will utilise existing metal sheet piling that is installed along the bank as a framework onto which the piece will be fixed and formed. In this manner the work does not directly touch or affect the riverbank edge. The work is being constructed with maintenance in mind, and the use of sections affording a practical method to access and maintain the piece is planned. The upper grassed bankside will be backfilled to ensure there are no protrusions or slip/trip hazards and a range of bio-diverse plants will be planted at specific points along the length of the work on the landside. The attention given to the riverbank by the proposed work aligns with the engagement project Knit for the River, where riverbanks were supported with coir rolls applied with knitted squares of undyed wool. In addition the shape and form of the work, which runs along, up and over the riverbank edge is given context by the close proximity of the sluice gate, affording control over water levels along the Cam. In a time where climate change is being forefronted the work aims to draw visual attention to rising water levels. The overall context surrounding the work is concluded with its links to feminine attributes and acknowledgment of the overlooked - for example the anonymous laundress workers, past knitting and lace patterns and the prints and paintings of Gwen Raverat

Image below: Caroline Wright, Flows, 2021, monoprint on paper, 12cm x 27cm

