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My old writing style was strongly controlled by the measured precision of my scientific discipline, evolutionary biology. It was a habit that I tried to break while working on this project, with its speculations and opinions, let alone dubious data. But my old practices of scientific rigour intentionally stopped personalities and feeling showing through. They cannot work here where there is so much colour in the uncertainty. So my old style had to go. Curiously, it was much harder to find facts from this 100-year-old history of local human culture than from the 50-million-year-old sediments of the European Tertiary. At first, that made me feel even less secure. So I would like to thank Rebecca Stott, professor of literature and creative writing at the University of East Anglia, for her help in trying to crack this old nut. I hope that it reveals a softer centre. I really enjoyed our teatime tutorials at the British Library.

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