

Record Breaking Start to Sutton Hoo

by Kate Sussams

Sutton Hoo has exceeded all expectations since opening as the newest National Trust site in March 2002. The items on loan from the British Museum (star objects are currently the sword, great shield and the sword belt fittings) have proved to be irresistible to thousands of visitors and numbers are averaging at just under 1000 per day. Original predictions for the annual visitor total were an "optimistic" 55,000; however, as of mid July, numbers are already up to 100,000! The site has been breaking all the records for the East Anglia Region – the most visited property, the most successful shop and restaurant, the largest number of group bookings...the list goes on. This has been a challenging, exciting and sometimes frustrating time for all staff and volunteers, all of whom have worked extremely hard to maintain high standards.

Of course, the burial mounds are the very reason the National Trust is here and one of our top priorities is to ensure that the large numbers of people visiting the site do not damage the very thing we are here to protect. Access to the mounds is by joining a guided tour only and the public tours run by the Sutton Hoo Society at weekends have been extremely popular, most booking up well in advance of the tour time. We do feel that the guided tour is one of the best ways to understand the site and we are very grateful to the Society for putting together an extensive training package for new guides.

A big part of any National Trust visit is always the chance to buy some goodies in the shop and have a cup of tea and slice of cake. Sutton Hoo is no different in that respect, although we have tried hard to make the products or food reflect the site, whether it be Mound 1-inspired jewellery or Swedish meatballs. One of the big successes in the shop has been the books and, in particular, *Burial Ground of Kings* by Martin Carver and *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial* by Angela Care Evans sell out fast.

The agreement we are fortunate to have with the British Museum will enable us to change the exhibition in the Treasury Room every year. A large part of my job this winter



*Left:
The entrance to the
Exhibition Hall at Sutton
Hoo.*

*Photographs by Cliff
Hoppitt*

will be to oversee the design and production of a new exhibition, together with Angus Wainwright and Angela Care Evans. So the items which are in the Treasury now will return to the BM in November and then a new exhibition will be unveiled next March. To have this kind of ongoing loan agreement with the BM is extremely rare in museum terms and will allow us to explore a wide range of important themes over the coming years.

Sutton Hoo opening times:

*Exhibition, restaurant and shop open daily
10am – 5pm until the end of September.
October : Weds–Sun, 10am – 5pm
1st November – mid-March : Saturday and
Sunday 10am – 4pm.*

*Walks and burial mounds open daily
throughout the year.*

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Right:

*The footpath to the
burial site*



*Left: National Trust archaeologist
Angus Wainwright comes face to
face with himself and the replica
helmet in the press report of the
opening.*

*Right: Sutton Hoo's own post
box – the first collection
left to right: Postman Paul Leech,
Property Manager Kate Sussams,
Site Warden Les Harvey and
Secretary Lynette Titford.
(Photograph: Sam Newton)*

