

SAXON

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SUTTON HOO SOCIETY

No 3

AUTUMN 1985

FREE TO MEMBERS

SUTTON HOO SOCIETY	CHAIRMAN	Malcolm Miles	REPRESENTATIVE OF	
	HON. SECRETARY	Mike Weaver	WOODBRIDGE	Rosemary Hoppitt
	HON. TREASURER	John Aldridge	MUSEUM	
	HON. MEMBERSHIP		DIRECTOR	Martin Carver
	SECRETARY	Elizabeth Miles	SITE MANAGEMENT	Peter Berry
	PUBLICATIONS		FERRY	Robert Simper
	OFFICER	Mark Mitchels		Count de Lengham
PUBLICITY	John Warburton		Bob Beardsley	

SECRETARY REPORTS EXCELLENT SEASON

Dear Member,

I would need 5 pages to sum up our exciting season at Sutton Hoo and I hope you will be content with a paltry 500 words! As we go to press, nearly 3000 visitors have enjoyed conducted tours of the site. Back in May and June a party of 15 persons seemed large; at the end of August, after the television coverage, we learned how to deal with 500 in a single weekend. Many thanks to the dozen guides who have helped out this season and to the same number of helpers who ran the ticket hut. Our souvenirs have sold well and it is estimated that each visitor spends about 50p on post-cards or books.

There have been 40 group visits to organise as parties from all over England have made their way to Sutton Hoo: school parties; museum groups; Learned Societies; archaeological groups; local history clubs. Incidentally there cannot be a lot wrong with our educational system as some sparkling questions and pertinent comments come from the youngsters who visit. Martin Carver and I marked out the 1939 boat and treasure chamber in string on mound 1 and, weather permitting, we call on volunteers to lie in the famous 'body space' and scatter the grave goods around them. Spontaneous applause for the recumbent actor is not unknown!

More of this at the A.G.M. Do come along if you can. Martin will give a report on the season and Mark Mitchels and I are preparing a Saxon entertainment. You have been warned!



Among the many letters I received this year was one from 'A ENGLISCAN GESIDAS', a Society which promotes a wider interest in Anglo-Saxon culture and tradition. No mock battles or political affiliations, their Secretary stresses. Do ask me for further details. They are promoting our Society in their Newsletter!

How pleased we were to be able to present the team with a digital electronic balance during the season and to be reaching the point where our healthy financial situation enables us to give further support.

My thanks to those who have given so much help to present the site to the visitors this 1985 Season and I do hope to meet you at the A.G.M. in a few weeks.

Mike Weaver
Hon. Secretary

SUTTON HOO SOCIETY INTERVIEW:

Recently ROSEMARY HOPPITT was interviewed for "SAXON" by Mark Mitchels.



MM: How did Woodbridge Museum come to establish links with Sutton Hoo?

RH: In the summer of '82 I started work on the research for the Sutton Hoo Exhibition in the Museum. In December 1982 Martin Carver was appointed Director Designate of the Sutton Hoo project, so immediately we got in touch with Martin at Birmingham University and told him of our existence, and said we'd like to help if we could. He came over, and we showed him the Museum, and told him what our plans were. He was quite helpful in getting in touch with the right people at the British Museum. Then the research went on for the display. When we opened the display in March '83, Martin came along and gave an address; Dr. Bruce-Mitford officially opened the exhibition. The Executive Committee of the Research Trust was there too.

MM: Were you able to get most of the exhibits from the British Museum, or were those the results of your own research?

RH: No, those were all available locally. The thing that Martin Carver helped us with was to put us in touch with the right people. I went down to the British Museum for a day and spent the time with Katherine East going through all the photos in the files in the Museum. We had copies made of some of them, and they let us have the originals of certain photos that they weren't able to make copies of; for example, the panorama of the boat:

that was the actual photo used in Volume 1 or 2 of the Sutton Hoo publication.

MM: What were the main problems of putting on the Museum Exhibition?

RH: When we decided to do the Sutton Hoo exhibition we felt we had to do it justice. But we couldn't have the actual archaeological finds - nor would we have wanted them, or been able to cope with them. So we had to look for another tack in order to put the exhibition on. We decided that we would go for an exhibition with a lot of local interest, because a lot of local people had been involved with it over the years. As the research went on it became more and more clear that the treatment of it would be as a historical event in itself, rather than looking at the Anglo-Saxons and Sutton Hoo as an Anglo-Saxon find in the way that it's done in the British Museum. It's something that happened in Woodbridge. We've got photos which convey that local interest, pictures of the people involved, and I think practically all the photos have the individuals named wherever possible.

MM: Do you find visitors to the Museum know something about Sutton Hoo already?

RH: Most of those who come have a vague knowledge of something special at Sutton Hoo. Too many of them come with an idea that it's a Viking ship burial, and that if they go up to the site they're going to see a Viking ship.



MM: The Museum has a programme of educational visits. What is the reaction to the Sutton Hoo story?

RH: What we try and accomplish is a two-fold visit: they come into the Museum, and have a lesson about the Anglo-Saxons, involving Sutton Hoo, and then they go up to the site. The children come with a vast range of knowledge. We try to introduce them to what it would have been like to live here in Anglo-Saxon times, and how we know that's what it was like: that information has been found under the ground, or on the surface. Then there's the idea that we get information from books, and so we listen to the Beowulf story - bring out the fact that the story itself is also an important archaeological document in that there are things described in Beowulf that pertain, almost exactly, to what we find up at Sutton. And then they do a little worksheet, answering questions around the Museum. We take them up on to the site, probably 2 or 3 days later, while things are still fresh in their minds. We try to get across to them what it was like to be there in Anglo-Saxon times. How it would have looked; how it is different from the way it is now. We use the descriptions in Beowulf, of the funeral, to get them thinking what it would have been like when the magnificent burial took place. Would there have been horsemen riding round the barrows? And all the people it would have taken to pull the boat up. We want them to use their imagination.

MM: Are they excited by it?

RH: Yes, the reaction seems to be good, and the comeback we've had from them in the way of letters and so on shows they have enjoyed it.

MM: What more would you like the Museum to do in the way of publicising and informing about Sutton Hoo?

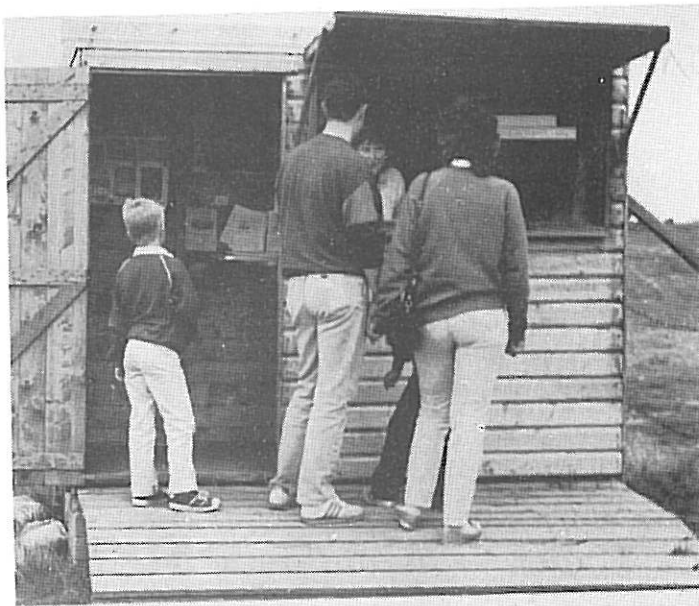
RH: I think as a Museum - as Woodbridge Museum - we've got to accept the fact that we're not a Sutton Hoo Museum, and we have a commitment to display the history of Woodbridge and district as a whole. We can't concentrate on just one topic, but it is a major part of the exhibition, and we shall continue to show interest and update our display. People do come in and ask directions to the site, and we can help in that sort of way.

MM: I must go on record as saying I think this is a superb exhibition. Who are the people involved in producing it? Yourself, obviously.

RH: Well, I designed it and planned the way

it was going to be organised. I suppose I did most of the work, and John Warburton took charge of the section on the objects and the little bit about the other Anglo-Saxon connections.

MM: I've obviously come to the right person. Thank you on behalf of all your visitors.



SUTTON HOO SOCIETY:

MEMBERSHIP GOING STRONG

As some of you will know, we have started sending out our first renewal requests and it is most heartening to see the continued interest and support shown to the Society.

Our membership now stands at 270 with further enquiries, including overseas, coming in daily.

On 20th April we had a most interesting tour of the Sutton Hoo Treasures conducted by Angela Evans of the British Museum - sorry we had to disappoint some of you but we shall organise another trip next year.

Our first Site Open Day will have come and gone by the time you receive "Saxon" but we look forward to seeing as many of you as possible. Tea and biscuits will be available - Primus Stove permitting!

As I've said before - "spread the word".

Any queries regarding membership please contact Liz Miles, "Two Barns", Eyke, Woodbridge, Suffolk - Tel. Eyke 460287.



The new group of graves, with members of the excavation team cleaning the eastern extension in the background.

(Photo: Nigel Macbeth.)

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

The research objectives in 1985 were to find the eastern edge of the Anglo-Saxon cemetery, to find prehistoric structures, and to learn how to excavate a large flat area in a soil whose archaeological difficulty is legendary. These things we did, in a short (8 weeks) and hectic season, but scarcely bargained for the many and curious discoveries that were made.

A Prehistoric "Town"

The prehistoric site has become a giant settlement - over 40 acres; a veritable town, or at least a central place for the area of the Suffolk sandlings, which was in existence long before Woodbridge or Ipswich. In the late neolithic and early Bronze Age, it was in its heyday, and consisted of timber houses and palisades leaving their traces in the form of post-sockets and slots cut in the gravel, as well as hearths and hollows from which many flint implements and some fine pieces of Rusticated Beaker were collected. We also discovered evidence that parts of the prehistoric site had survived as earthworks for the Anglo-Saxons to find.

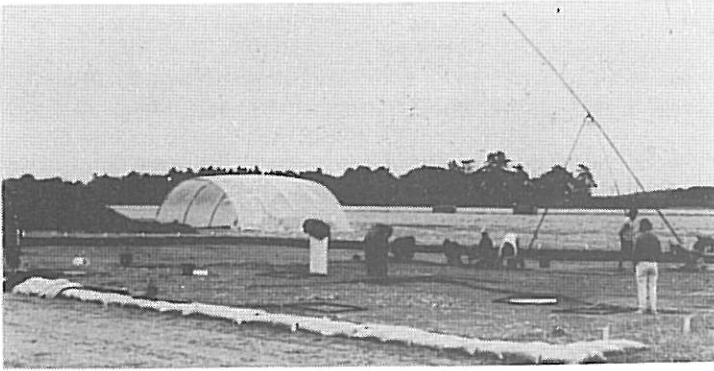
A Strange Cemetery

At the eastern edge of the Sutton Hoo site beneath the barley, we discovered 12 more graves bringing the total to 15. I have never

seen an ancient cemetery in England with so much variety in the manner of burial; every one is different, and in each case there is a real sense of encounter with an individual. Half a dozen people lay on their backs, two on their fronts, and two others were dumped face-down in the kneeling position. Two were in coffins, in one case a coffin 8 feet long at the end of which had been placed a large bone. It was part of a pelvis of a pig or deer - in short it had once been a joint of meat placed in the grave for the dead person. Another example had a broken neck - perhaps had been hanged - and another had a cut through the top of the skull. A large grave contained not only a body placed, unusually in a hurdling position, but also a large wooden artifact (betrayed by a thin layer of black dust) which resembled nothing so much as a plough. The 'ploughman' as he was soon nicknamed was not hurdling, but pushing - fossilised in the act of ploughing itself. Nine of the burials had been placed with the feet to the east in the Christian manner and in one case an east-west burial had cut a north-south beneath.

Heathens, Christians or Criminals?

What are we to make of this strange peripheral group of graves? were these really Anglo-Saxons, or if not, what was their relationship to the ship-burials which lie less than a



hundred yards away? We are still awaiting the result of radio-carbon dating, which will help considerably with the interpretation, but for the benefit of SAXON readers, some speculations will be offered at this stage.

The "ploughman" and the joint of meat suggest a rural and nostalgic form of paganism - and perhaps this great cemetery is all of a piece, continuing in use from the 6th century to the 9th century AD, from the time of Redwald to the time of the Vikings. If so, this would have significant implications for the early history of England: Sutton Hoo would have provided a cultural and religious home-from-home for the Scandinavians - including those later Vikings whose targets were mainly the Christian monasteries.

Why then were so many of the graves aligned east to west in the Christian manner? This suggests rather that the people of Sutton were converted, like others in East Anglia, by the missions of Fursa and Felix, and that a Christian cemetery overlay that of the earlier pagans. In this case there will be a church a few dozen yards away from our site, a church whose existence was forgotten, but which can be found again by archaeological method.

There is however a third possibility, suggested by the four examples of people who had been executed. It may be that the Anglo-Saxon pagan cemetery had been abandoned at the time of the conversion to Christianity, but that its site was remembered - and feared. It was then used only for the disposal of misfits and outcasts, the cranks, freaks and executed criminals who did not, in the eyes of a new harsh society, deserve a Christian burial.

Archaeological Exploration - the Next Phase

Which of these ideas are right will only be known from further excavation, particularly of the strip of land which connects our 15 new burials with the mounds to the west. In 1985, we learnt how difficult, as well as how exciting this excavation is going to be. Over 1000 man - hours are needed to prepare a surface 16x24 metres in area, to the point at

which graves can be seen; each grave then takes more than 80 hours to dissect. A constant supply of water, protection from the wind, and a high vantage point for taking photographs are all essential. Experiments this year included a rain machine (built by Peter Berry) a photopod (lent by the British Museum), photography from a hot air balloon (thanks to Brian Ribbans), and from a Super Jolly Green Giant helicopter flying out of RAF Woodbridge (thanks to John Minks). George Edens of K and C Mouldings pioneered a technique for making reproductions of our burials, using Silicon Rubber, and some of these bodies are currently being mounted for display on the site, so that our visitors will themselves be able to encounter them, face to face. Ray Sutcliffe and his BBC film crews captured live a great many of the most exciting moments of the season, moments which, to judge from the viewing figures of our last programme (3.1 million) will soon be shared by many people in England.

The Sutton Hoo Society continues to help me and the project in innumerable ways, managing visitors, giving site tours, protecting the site and donating vital equipment. The project could not function without their support, and as Director I offer my heartfelt thanks to its members, and the promise of continuing participation in a great archaeological voyage of discovery.

Martin Carver
27 Sep 85.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Our thanks go to the landowners, residents and farmers of the Sutton Hoo area for their continuing support and encouragement; in particular to Mrs Anne Tranmer, Mr Colin Walker, Mr Peter Waring and Mr Leslie Carter.

THE FERRY BOAT 'SAXON' AND OTHER SHIPS



One thing definitely leads to another. In the spring the Sutton Hoo Society made a trip to the British Museum to view the treasure found in 1939 in Mound 1. All my life I have seen photographs and drawings of these finds, but this was the first time that I had set eyes on the real objects. They were much more impressive than I had imagined. Previously my own interest in Sutton Hoo had been firmly fixed on the ships, but now I too wondered about the splendour and extravagant exhibitionism of the Kings of East Anglia.

The two great auroch replica drinking horns from the Sutton Hoo ship burial gripped my rural imagination. They must have come off impressive beasts who perhaps had once fed on the marshland grazing along beside the River Deben. In my mind one thing was leading to another; we needed an impressive way to launch the new ferryboat. Seafaring men have always been more superstitious than landmen and surely no Anglo Saxon sailors would have gone to sea without first appeasing their Gods in some way.



Such a ceremony might have been undertaken by a King or Clan Chief. Since the Deben no longer has its own local Royal Family we asked the Mayoress of Woodbridge to perform our launching ceremony. Mrs. Johnnie Perry undertook this tricky operation with great spirit and the boat was duly named Saxon as a deluge of ale from a drinking horn fell across her bow.

With the romantic side over we fell to the serious business of operating a ferry service between Woodbridge and Sutton. On the face of it this looks a very easy undertaking but there are some hefty difficulties. The problems are that at low tide the river

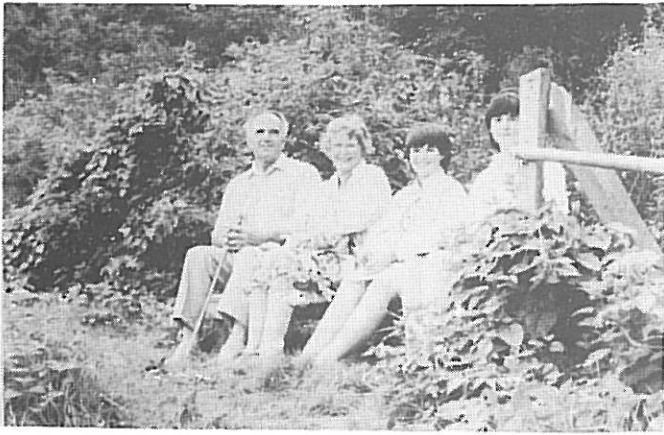


virtually dries out and that the old ferry landing hards were in a bad state of repair. Peter Berry, the ever active Sutton Hoo Site Manager, solved this in one masterful stroke by constructing a new landing hard on the Sutton side and then made an even more sterling effort by building a new set of steps up the Sutton Ferry Cliff to join up the old



footpath system which had been destroyed by a landslide. Reopening the Ferry meant reopening the footpath system that went with it.

The Sutton landing was no trouble but the Woodbridge low water hard was covered with mud and discouraged several would-be passengers. Again Peter Berry came to the rescue and with



a party of Woodbridge boat owners (who use this landing) rebuilt the top end of the low water hard. This did not completely solve the problem though. The remaining difficulty is that the channel beside the hard has silted up since the Tide Mill ceased operation. If a new channel from the Wyllie Pool could be re-routed it might reopen the channel beside the hard and the passengers would then be able to step out on to the hard from the boat. By mid summer Roger Edmunds, the regular ferryman, abandoned trying to land on the Woodbridge hard and switched to using the old traditional Ferry high tide landing at the steps in Ferry dock. This meant that the Ferry could only operate 2 hours each side of high water.



In spite of all the difficulties, Roger and other ferrymen ran regular services every Saturday and Sunday from May to September. The response from the public depended largely on the weather which for most of the summer of 1985 was abominable. On a fine Sunday afternoon with a high tide over thirty people would cross, but on a dull afternoon it was down to about three. As well as this a number of parties booked the ferry on weekdays and evenings and this was highly successful. By the beginning of September 512 people had paid to cross the River Deben in the Saxon and Woodbridge Ferry had a least justified its re-opening.

In a way our Society is following in the footsteps of the Anglo Saxons who buried their dead on a hill top overlooking Woodbridge. The finds in Mound 1 show that they were a land and a sea society; we also have an active land side safeguarding (or attempting to) the site and budding maritime side. The idea of building a replica of the 85ft ship is firmly entrenched in our Society's constitution. Overlooking the modest matter of raising half a million pounds to construct such a replica and moving on to a possible building site one



again thinks of the Anglo Saxons. The East Anglian Royal Family probably had their ships built the same way as anyone else, by simply commissioning a reputable local shipwright to build one at any spot on the Rivers Alde-Ore, Deben or Orwell where the deep water channel runs close to the bank, but for my guess Ipswich or Woodbridge would have been the best site for such a shipyard. In Victorian times it was quite normal for two or three shipwrights and several boys to build an 80ft wooden sailing barge in a few months. Probably the Anglo Saxons, once they had split their oak trees into planks, operated in much the same way. A replica could be built on the Deben as the original ship might have been. Until a replica is built and goes to sea, we shall not unravel all the mysteries of Sutton Hoo. Then we shall see how England's seafaring history began and one thing leads to another. . . .

Robert Simper



8.10 Sutton Hoo

*The Million-Pound Grave
I didn't quite see how anybody
was going to take it on, but
since no one knew anything
about it anyhow, it seemed to
me that you might as well
have a bash, so bash we had.*

(C. W. PHILLIPS - July 1939)

As Hitler's armies prepared to roll across Europe in the summer of 1939, three local men from Suffolk made one of the greatest archaeological discoveries in the British Isles - the discovery of a spectacular hoard of royal regalia buried in the midst of the ghost outline of a great wooden ship.

BBC 2

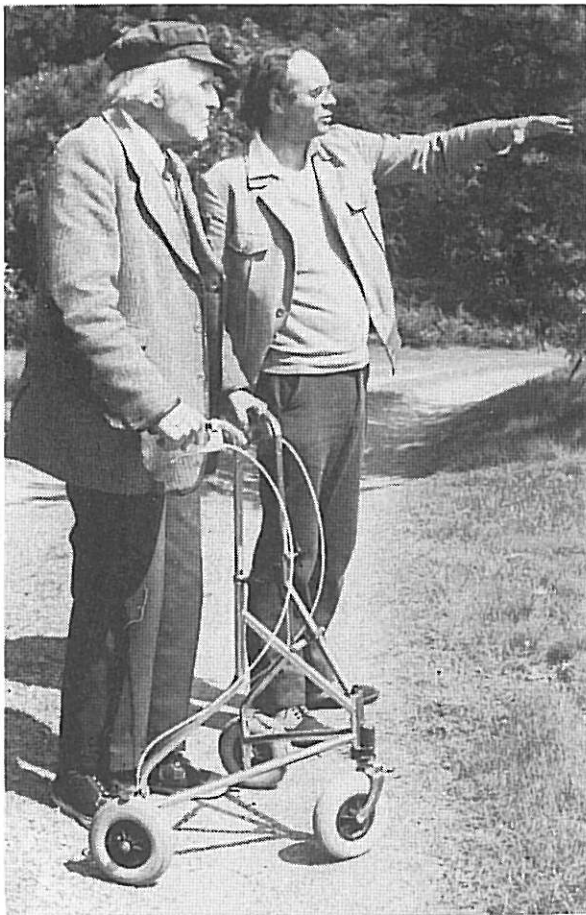
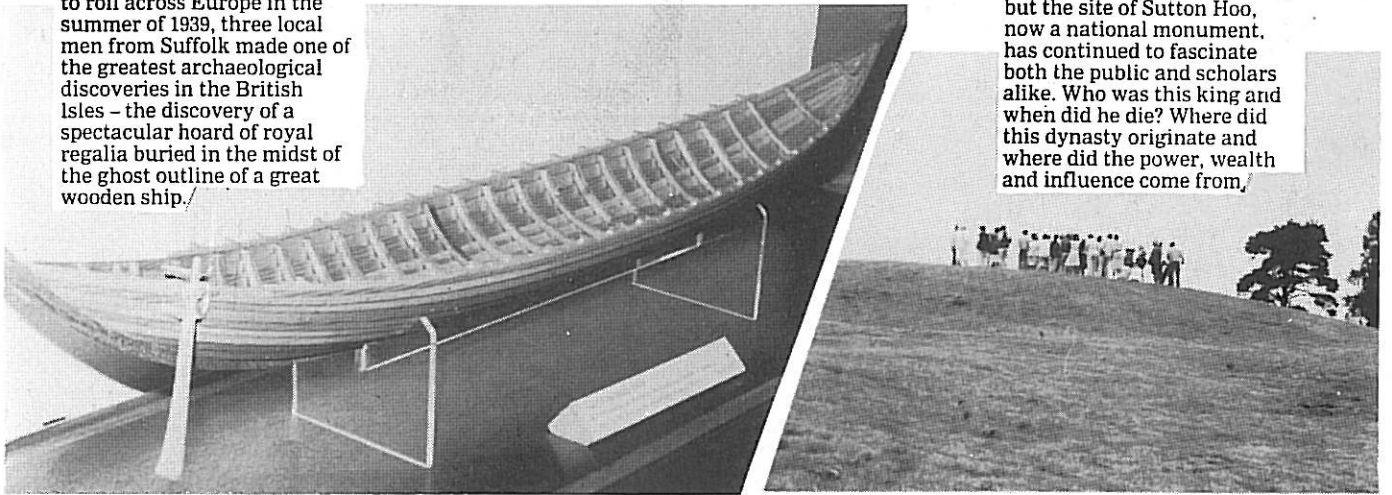
THE 1985
SEASON

8.10 Sutton Hoo

*At Sutton Hoo, you see, we
were posing problems, but we
weren't answering them.*

(MARGARET GUIDO - 1939)

When the burial of one of the early High Kings of England was discovered in 1939 contemporary events obscured its initial sensation, but the site of Sutton Hoo, now a national monument, has continued to fascinate both the public and scholars alike. Who was this king and when did he die? Where did this dynasty originate and where did the power, wealth and influence come from?



Charles Phillips, the excavator of the ship-burial discovered beneath mound 1, who died on Monday, 23rd September. He is seen here on his last visit to Sutton Hoo in June this year, in the company of the new project's Director, Martin Carver.

(Photograph: Edward Morgan)

MR C. W. PHILLIPS

Mr C. W. Phillips OBE, FSA, who died on September 23 will be remembered for the sterling work he did for British archaeology while the subject was still left in the main to private enterprise.

His most notable contribution was to excavate and accord prompt publication to the Sutton Hoo ship burial, the most important single archaeological discovery ever made in Britain.

His success in revealing the structure of the ship itself, of which only the ghost remained in the soil, and in the recording and recovery of the intricate deposit of grave goods which it contained was the more remarkable that during the summer of 1939 the country lay under the threat of war.

Controlling the party of highly skilled archaeologists who rallied to his support and surmounting the many technical difficulties posed by the excavations called for exceptional qualities.

Publication also posed its problems. The need to consign the funds to a safe refuge once war had broken out had to be reconciled with the demands of international scholarship. Phillips responded by ensuring the rapid and effective, if necessarily provisional, publication in 1940 of a discovery for which the learned world had to wait

until 1983 for the complete publication of a definitive account.

When called upon to respond to Sutton Hoo Phillips had already earned a high reputation as an archaeological field-worker an excavator. As a Fellow and Librarian of Selwyn College, Cambridge, he had consistently directed his leisure to field archaeology.

He paid particularly close attention to the Fenland basin and the Lincolnshire Wolds where he discovered and excavated the Giants' Hills Long Barrow, though he also ranged more widely afield to Wessex, Mendip, Anglesey and elsewhere. He also played a key role in establishing the Prehistoric Society on a national footing by serving as Honorary Secretary throughout its first critical decade.

It was not until after wartime services in the RAFVR that Phillips took a salaried post in archaeology as Archaeology Officer of the Ordnance Survey.

Charles Phillips will be remembered as a man consistently who put more into archaeology than he aimed to extract from it. His reward was a sense that he had helped to advance a subject to which he felt a deep personal commitment. Plans exist to publish the memoirs he completed before his final illness.

© Times Newspapers Ltd.

All Rights Reserved.

Reproduced from "The Times"

1st October 1985 with permission