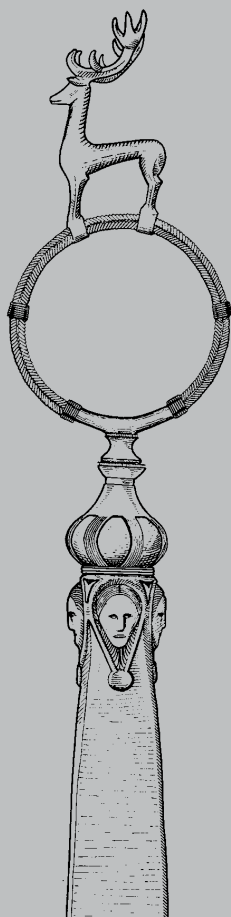




The hanging bowl from cremation 8 which contained the remains of a probable adult female as well as animal offerings. © Trustees of the British Museum



New dates for early Sutton Hoo

From April to July 2000, excavation of the footprint of the visitor centre, near Tranmer House, at Sutton Hoo revealed an Anglo-Saxon cemetery with thirty-one burials. A Bronze Age cremation under a barrow and a network of Iron Age ditches were also recorded. Ten years on, analysis of the finds is nearing completion. It is planned to publish them in the near future in the East Anglian Archaeology series. CHRIS FERN of Fern Archaeology has managed the archive and project since 2007, on behalf of Suffolk County Council who excavated the site. Chris will lecture to the Society's AGM in February, but here he gives us a preview of some of the key findings.

With a programme of radiocarbon dating funded by the Sutton Hoo Society, most of the work has been funded by the National Trust; with extensive conservation and analysis undertaken by the British Museum, where the archive will ultimately reside.

The combined work of conservators and experts, it offers new and significant insights

into our understanding of the rites and chronology of the Anglo-Saxon funeral in Suffolk almost 1,500 years ago.

Moreover, it is important ultimately for our interpretation of the origins and pedigree of Sutton Hoo barrow cemetery, located just 500m to its south. In contrast, the 2000 cemetery was one not of princes

but of the folk. Nevertheless, some of the burials stand out for their level of investment, presenting a significant prelude to the elite mound cemetery. One means of understanding them may be as a mechanism for the creation of ancestral memory, a story begun at Tranmer House but ended at Sutton Hoo.

Landscape

Evidence for the environment of the time suggests the cemetery was established in an area of cleared ground, in the midst of a landscape of thinly wooded heathland. Meadow grasses and weeds, as well as sporadic heather and gorse, grew amongst the graves. Traces of the enclosure-system that had dominated the promontory ground on the east side of the River Deben in the Iron Age remained visible, though seemingly abandoned in the Roman period, and probably veiled in heathland growth by the early medieval era. A radiocarbon date from a fire set in the main ditch earthwork is calibrated to AD240–540. It is very probable that the early Anglo-Saxon cemetery was consciously founded within the remnants of the ancient field-system. But an even older monument, a small Bronze Age barrow, also served as a focus for one group of burials (Fig. 1). The cremation at the centre of its ring-ditch returned a radiocarbon date of 1490–1320 cal BC.

Analysis now establishes thirty-one graves for the Anglo-Saxon mixed-rite cemetery: twelve definite cremations and nineteen inhumations (present as sand bodies), though a number of further cremated individuals are indicated by displaced remains (Fig. 1). As one magazine put it colourfully at the time of the find, they might represent the ‘parents and grandparents of the East Anglian kings’ (Brit. Arch. 2000). They do not, however, comprise the whole population of the original cemetery, but perhaps only 10-20%. It is very likely that the burial-ground extends to the north-west, where finds have been made, including the well-known ‘Bromeswell bucket’. Examination of these, and new finds recovered by metal-detector survey in 2000, suggests that the earliest focus of the cemetery might lie in this area, datable perhaps from the late 5th century.

From the outset, the question of the dating of the excavated burials was identified as crucial, both for the understanding of the cemetery per se, as well as its bearing on the Sutton Hoo elite burial-ground, in use c. AD580/90-630/40. As part of the analysis of the new finds, therefore, the Sutton Hoo Society funded a programme of dating for the cremation burials, to be followed

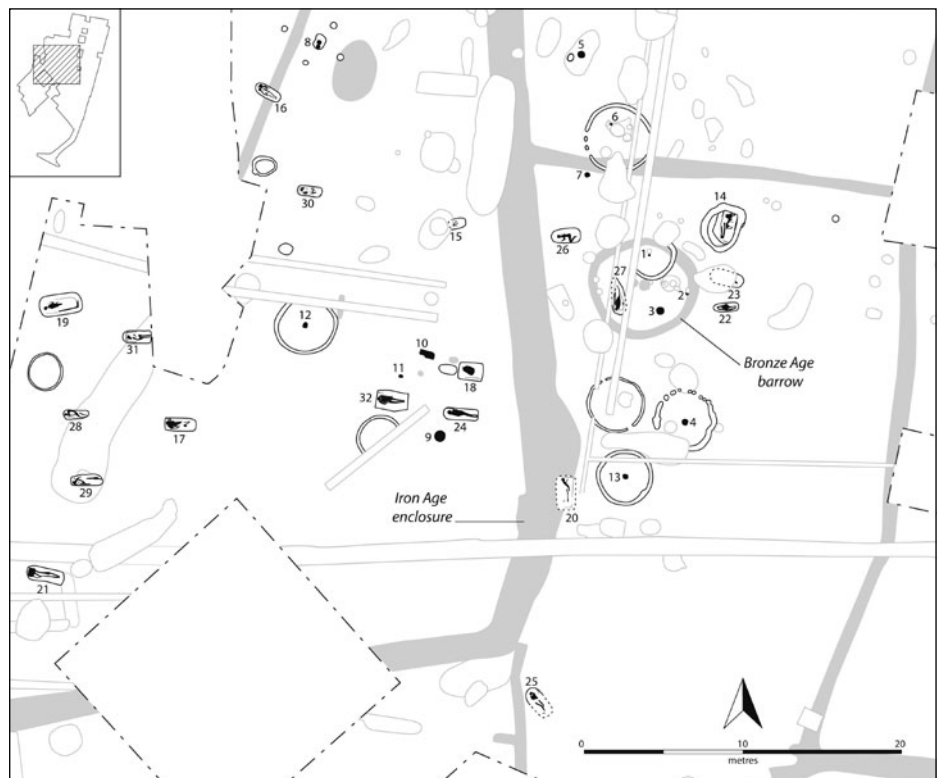


Fig. 1 Plan of the Tranmer House early Anglo-Saxon cemetery. © Fern Archaeology.

by chronological modelling, the latter undertaken by Dr Peter Marshall. Besides the Bronze Age burial, ten dates have been obtained on eight burials. The results have proved important.

Cremation rite

The model estimates, at 95% probability, a chronological bracket for the cremation graves of cal AD520–85. However, it is

statistically likely, at 68% probability, that they took place over a very short period of time, perhaps as little as a single generation (1–35 years). The end of the rite in AD 580 is calculated as 83% probability and by AD 590 at 91% probability. This is late for the cremation rite in Anglo-Saxon East Anglia, viewed generally, though provides a significant prelude to the cremations at the elite Sutton Hoo cemetery. This date, moreover,

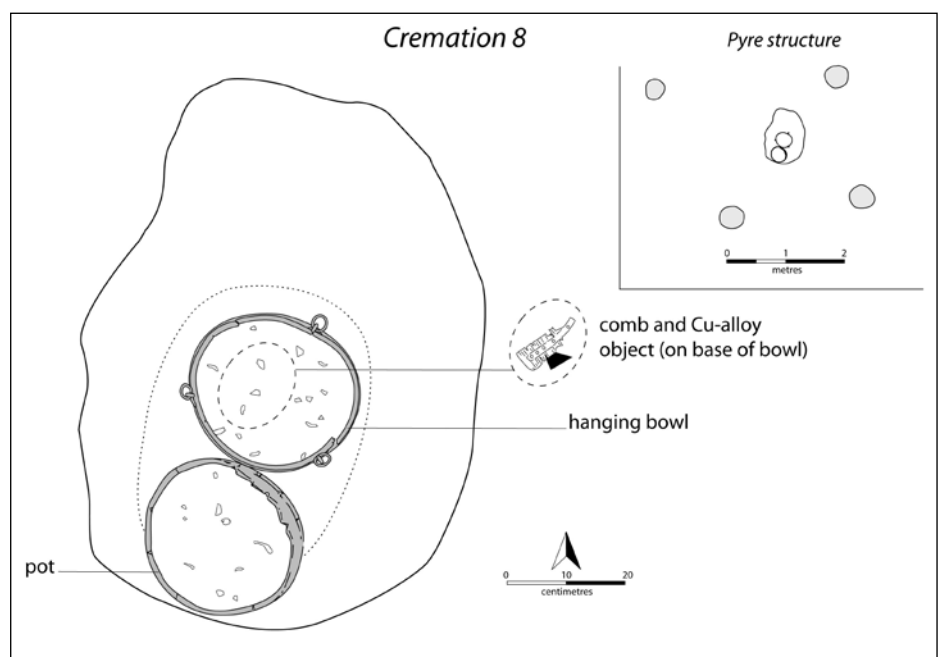


Fig. 2 Plan of cremation 8: the remains of an adult female and animals in a bronze bowl and pot. © Fern Archaeology.

accords well with the inhumations from Tranmer House. The grave goods, especially the weaponry, have been studied with the support of Prof. John Hines (using the results of the forthcoming English Heritage project: Anglo-Saxon England c.570-720: the chronological basis). They too suggest a short time span from the second-quarter of the 6th century to the opening years of the 7th century. The cemetery it seems, or at least interment in the Tranmer House part of the burial-ground, had ceased prior to the great ship-burials under Mounds 1 and 2, and even perhaps before the horse-burial under Mound 17. Why should this be the case: that the cemetery of the ‘folk’ was closed to burial, at the same time as the mound cemetery was reaching its apogee of funerary, political theatre? Might it be, that, having established a new élite cemetery within site of the local ancestral burial-ground, Sutton Hoo’s princes then appropriated the ritual landscape for their own exclusive ends? If so, where was the community burial-ground moved; to a new Christian cemetery perhaps?

Some of the Tranmer House cremations would certainly have presented a very eye-catching display, whilst jointly the burials suggest an undercurrent of social competition, expressed through dead ancestors and the medium of the funeral. Chief amongst them is cremation 8 (Fig. 2). This comprised a hanging bowl and pot which, Jacqueline McKinley (Wessex Archaeology) has found, contained the remains of an adult, probably a female. To this, Julie Bond’s (Bradford University) analysis has added animal offerings of a cow (or steer), a horse, sheep, pig and possibly a dog. Another three cremations also yielded the combination of cattle and horse, together with other animals.

Surrounding cremation 8 were four small pits. These may have been the post-holes of a pyre structure, some 2m x 3m in plan. Comparison of its size with examples from the Saxon Continent, and Anglo-Saxon England, indicates that it was large by contemporary standards, as might be expected given the animal contingent cremated. Nine ring-ditches were also found associated with cremations, some with central graves, although a number showed only traces of a burial. The earth excavated from them would have enabled a small mound to be constructed over the central grave, which in some or all cases might also have marked the site of the actual pyre, as with cremation 8.

Weapon graves

The inhumations too stand out for the high number of weapon-burials amongst

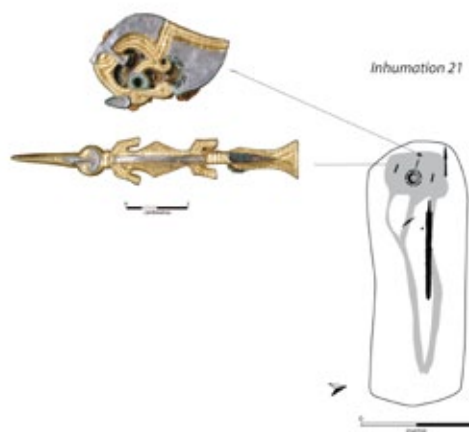


Fig. 3 Inhumation 21 with decorative shield-mounts. Drawing © Fern Archaeology. Photos © Trustees of the British Museum.

their number: thirteen in all. Most had a shield and spear combination, though two had swords, indicating their elevated social standing. It is not the case, however, that Tranmer House was a ‘warrior’ cemetery, for women, children and infants seem also to figure amongst the dead. In addition, no weaponry was associated with any of the cremations. The chronology of the burials too seems to count against them representing an ‘imperial guard’ to élite masters buried at the mound cemetery. However, one individual stands out further, a probable adult male in grave 21, interred with a shield decorated with the gilt-bronze motifs (Fig. 3) of an eagle and ‘dragon’ (or predatory sea-monster, depending on your interpretation). Though much smaller, they may be likened in their basic form and combination to the famous mounts from the Mound 1 shield.

It is possible that the high percentage of weapon-graves at Tranmer House is a result of bias in what is a small cemetery sample. But it is also the case that it bears interesting comparison with the findings from other central sites with élite or ‘royal’, associations (Fig. 4). Whilst other ‘folk’ cemeteries of the region, such

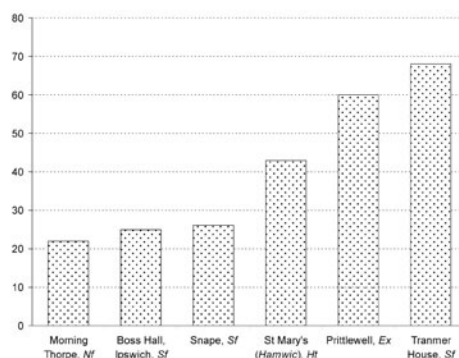


Fig. 4 Percentages of weapon-burials at select Anglo-Saxon cemeteries.

as Snape and Boss Hall (Ipswich) have demonstrated 20-30% weapon-burials, the Tranmer House figure of 68% is more akin to the proportion at St Mary’s Stadium, Southampton (Anglo-Saxon Hamwic), and the cemetery surrounding the grave of the Prittlewell ‘Prince’, in Essex. It may be that at these sites we are witnessing in burial a manifestation of the Realpolitik of the age. That, at this critical era of kingdom creation and the emergence of kings, it was in real terms the number of warriors that a ruler could attract to his banner and retain that in large part dictated his political fortunes. The historical context to Sutton Hoo goes some way to corroborating this picture, by the fact of King Rædwald’s recorded supremacy in the 7th century, ‘... over all the southern kingdoms...’ south of the River Humber (Bede HE II.5. Trans. McClure and Collins 1994, 77-8). Mound 1 abounds with the symbolism of such an individual, with drinking and feasting gear suited to entertaining a great warband, together with a panoply of weaponry. Such influence may well have been based on political structures established in the previous century.

Animal sacrifice

Animal sacrifice too figured prominently at the later élite cemetery, together with bronze bowl cremation. These, and the famous ship-burials, have been of course linked with the mortuary imagery of northern Europe, especially Vendel-period (c.AD550-750) Sweden. It may be to the Mälaren region of Sweden also that the Tranmer House animal cremations look; though the range of animal offerings is to an extent paralleled at Spong Hill, Norfolk.

But it is what the combination of human and animal on the pyre might mean that is most intriguing. In the art and mythology of the pre-Christian Germanic peoples we are presented with a range of animal-human personas and bestial familiars; not least the shape-changing Odin/Woden with his steed and raven spirit helpers, and the Anglo-Saxon heroes and kingdom-founders, Hengist and Horsa, whose names translate as ‘stallion’ and ‘horse’. Hence, at the funeral, possibly the creatures’ participation beyond the grave was envisaged or perhaps their sacrifice was believed to transfer key animal attributes to the ancestor. Certainly it was a powerful spectacle by which to remember the deceased and hence enrich the standing of living relations. Ultimately, by conflagration of the combined remains on the pyre – a dense smoke carrying the enmeshed spirits up to a pagan ‘heaven’ – a new and potent superhuman ancestral identity might have been envisaged.

Autumn Conference takes a Swedish perspective



The royal burial mounds at Gamla Uppsala © Pauline Moore

The Society has announced the programme for its next conference, which will be held on Sunday 11 September this year at the Waterfront Building in Ipswich, part of University Campus Suffolk (UCS). Billed as an international day conference, it is entitled *Sutton Hoo: a Swedish perspective*.

The chairman will be Neil Price, Professor of Archaeology in the University of Aberdeen, who fascinated our last conference with his account of the ritual and political significance of the Saxon meadhall. For this conference, Neil has successfully approached the Royal Gustavus Adolphus Academy in Uppsala for sponsorship to allow four Swedish-based academics to be our main speakers. The Academy is dedicated to the study of Nordic folk culture and is one of eighteen royal academies in Sweden. Founded in 1932, three hundred years after the death in battle of King Gustavus Adolphus (Gustav II Adolf), its full name in Swedish is Kungliga Gustav Adolfs Akademien för

svensk folkkultur.

Neil will open the conference at 10am with a paper called *An eye for Odin? The shared world-views of Scandinavia and Sutton Hoo*. After coffee, attention will turn to Valsgärde, which the society visited in September 2009. First, Dr John Ljungkvist of the University of Uppsala will discuss new research on the élite burial sites of both Gamla Uppsala and Valsgärde. As reported in our last issue (**Saxon 51**), John spoke to the Medieval Seminar (British Museum / Institute of Archaeology) on a similar topic last January. He will be followed by Professor Anne-Sofie Gräslund, also of the University of Uppsala, who is celebrated for her typology of late Viking runestone styles, but on this occasion she will be talking about the cremation graves of Valsgärde.

After lunch we will hear from two Iron Age specialists, though Dr Torun Zachrisson, of the University of Stockholm, will be talking about the influence of Byzantium seen in exotic objects in eastern Sweden and beyond, from about 550-700. Sutton Hoo, of course, shows that influence in the great silver dish of Anastasius as well as other items in the ship burial. The afternoon's second speaker will be Professor Frands Herschend, again from the University of Uppsala (where Neil Price was once Reader in Archaeology) who will talk about the Vendel period boat graves in Central Sweden, being those that most closely parallel the Sutton Hoo ship burials. Our Research Director, Professor Martin Carver, will close the conference before 4 pm by asking 'where next?' for the Sutton Hoo / Scandinavia axis.

This will be our seventh conference in thirteen years and the first to look firmly abroad. Hitherto, we have chosen aspects of Saxon life in England, beginning in 1998 with the fashionable question of cultural identity and the creation of East Anglia. That topic was extended in 2004 by looking at real as well as imaginary and symbolic Anglo-Saxon landscapes. Two conferences have looked at aspects of belief: the conversion period in 2002 and pagan burial in 2006. Dark age trade was examined by the North Sea Communities conference in 2000, and arts and crafts, as represented in the Saxon meadhall, was the subject three years ago. The conferences have run biennially until last year, when it was decided to take an extra year to assemble an international line up.

As the archaeology of Sutton Hoo develops, its wider context becomes increasingly important. This autumn's conference will give us a chance to hear the latest research on the high-status cemeteries of Uppland in Sweden, and to begin to understand the ideological landscape in which they were set.

Further details, back page.



One of the helmets at Gamla Uppsala © Jonathan Abson



A gold pendant disc from Gamla Uppsala © Pauline Moore

A trip to Northumberland

The Sutton Hoo Society's autumn trip to Northumberland, from Monday 13 to Friday 17 September, visited Jarrow, Durham, Lindisfarne and Hadrian's Wall, and left PAULINE MOORE longing to spend more time there.



Bede's old world meets our new one. All photos © Pauline Moore / Mike Argent

On our way north from Sutton Hoo, we picked up our last four passengers in Sherwood Forest, not far from Edmonstowe, 'the holy place of Edwin', one of the spots where the body of the great Northumbrian king rested on its final journey. Edwin, you will recall, had won his throne with the aid of Raedwald of Sutton Hoo at the Battle of the River Idle.

After staying overnight at Hexham we went on to Bede's World near Jarrow, the interpretation centre next to St Paul's Church. Here we were met by our friend, Kate Sussams, who used to be Property Manager of Sutton Hoo. Kate told us how Bede's World works with the council, schools and the church to offer opportunities to people with social problems to experience a different way of life. Hers is a demanding job, and obviously rewarding.

She also explained why you walk unexpectedly into a Roman atrium, complete with pool, and then through equally Roman colonnades. According to the guide book, Benedict Biscop (c.628-689) had visited Rome and was inspired by its 'church architecture, music, liturgy, books, reliquaries and vestments'. He and his companion were among those who endorsed the Roman church practices at the Synod of Whitby in 664 and he later became a caretaker abbot at St. Peter and St. Paul, Canterbury. On his return to Northumbria, King Ecgfrith gave him seventy hides of land, and Benedict founded St. Peter's monastery at Wearmouth. He brought John, arch cantor

at St. Peter's in Rome, to teach the monks Roman chant. The king gave him forty more hides on which he founded St. Paul's at Jarrow.

Without Benedict Biscop, there might never have been the Venerable Bede. Bede was given to the monastery at the age of seven, and spent the whole of his life in the twin monastery of Jarrow/Wearmouth, learning, teaching and writing, immersed in the Benedictine practices laid down by Benedict Biscop. He made translations from Latin into Old English so people living in remote places might understand the Christian message, and his most famous work, the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* was completed in 731. Bede's much-visited tomb at Jarrow developed into a local cult, until his



Kate Sussams at Bede's World

bones were taken to Durham Cathedral in 1022, where they still lie. He was sanctified in 1899.

With time pressing, we could not stay after a delicious buffet lunch to see the Anglo-Saxon farm at Bede's World, but moved on to Durham. Because of roadworks, we made our way from river level to the cathedral on its height. We assembled to the sound of the organ and a bugle playing the Last Post and Reveille at a memorial service for a member of the British Legion. Then we split into three groups: our guides battled valiantly against the noise of chairs being stacked, scaffolding removed from a new window, and an organist practising.

Durham Cathedral was initially built to enshrine the remains of Saint Cuthbert, and we learnt much about the architecture and history of this glorious building. It lost its monastery at the Reformation, and it was closed by the Commonwealth to become a prison for 3000 Scots, before being reconsecrated at the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660.

After the Synod of Whitby, Cuthbert (635-687) was sent to the Priory at Lindisfarne to help make the transition there to the Roman tradition. Desiring a life of contemplation, he was allowed to live a hermit's existence on one or two rocky islets nearby, before being persuaded to become Bishop of Lindisfarne in 685. He returned to Farne Island to die and was buried in Lindisfarne Priory. Miracles were reported at his grave, but his bones did not rest peacefully. Threatened by Viking invasion, they were hidden in Chester le Street, Ripon, Durham and Lindisfarne again, before finally in 1104 the remains (said to be uncorrupted) were entombed in the new cathedral, with the head of St. Oswald put with them for safety. His tomb is on an elevated 'feretory' (a travelling shrine) behind the sanctuary, a place of quiet pilgrimage.

Bede lies at the opposite end of the cathedral in an equally significant tomb, perhaps more crowded by visitors. Maybe this would trouble Bede less than it would Cuthbert. Bede liked to meet people and talk to them. Because of Bede we know more about King Raedwald and King Edwin than we otherwise might.

When our coach died on a steep hill – the only route out of Durham – our skilful driver backed it round to the nearby coach-park and sent for a local, relief coach and an engineer. Our dinner was delayed by an hour. We were glad to hear the trouble had been fixed.



Lindisfarne Castle and Holy Island

Next day we set off for **Alnwick**, rainbows glowing all along the route. We visited the impressive castle, home to the mighty Percy family for 700 years. It is as richly provided with collections of paintings, porcelain and furniture as any aristocratic house in the country, a reminder of how nearly this became our royal family. The Duke and Duchess of Northumberland still live there between October and March each year. Harry Hotspur meets Harry Potter here – the great courtyard was the basic setting for the quidditch games in the films. We also visited the lovely gardens with a classical cascade and an area of trees and fountains, where water is used like sculpture in beautiful and surprising forms. Espalier crab-apple trees brought colour and autumnal tints flamed in the borders.

After lunch we moved along the coast to **Lindisfarne - Holy Island** - to be met by Harry Beamish of the National Trust who

led us to the castle. This famous silhouette can be seen as you reach the coast and cross the equally famous causeway at low tide. It was originally an Elizabethan fort, but was eventually acquired by Edward Hudson (founder of *Country Life*) who got Sir Edwin Lutyens to convert it into a holiday retreat. It is now National Trust property, open to the public to climb spiral staircases and be greeted by a sort of ‘medieval meets Arts and Crafts’ medley. Outside is a Gertrude Jekyll walled garden, currently being restored.

A walk back, skirting the harbour, allows you to photograph the overturned ‘cobles’ or fishing boats, cut in half and used, now, for storage – but think of Mr. Peggotty in *David Copperfield*, who lived in just such an upside-down boat.

In the ruins of Lindisfarne Priory you can find a peaceful sanctuary, even with wind-tossed seagulls and sheep bleating nearby. Here St Cuthbert lived and worked

and here he was buried before being moved to Durham. The history of the site and a chance to learn about St Aidan, St Oswald and St Cuthbert - and about the Viking raids - is graphically presented at the Priory and at the Lindisfarne Centre, together with a replica of the exquisite, illuminated, Lindisfarne Gospels and a clever piece of virtual technology which allows you to turn the pages on screen.

We returned to the coach. It had fuel problems again. Les, our driver, ran to the back to prime a pump, rushed forward to drive for about 150 yards, then ran back again... and again. With several stops we made it over the causeway, heaved a sigh of relief and then saw the mainline railway. We crossed that, too.

The same rescue coach came and got us back to the hotel, to a dinner an hour and a half late. A new fuel pump was fitted, but the driver limped in, late, and ordered a replacement coach to be brought



Ruins of Lindisfarne Priory



The group visiting Chesters Fort

overnight to serve us for the last two days. We were very grateful to him for saving our trip.

Thursday was crowded. We were given a guided tour of the beautiful site of **Chesters Fort**, by Georgina Plowright, English Heritage's Curator of their Hadrian's Wall collection. She gave us a very helpful interpretation of a typical Roman Fort and its layout: formal buildings, parade ground, secret strongroom, commandant's house, bath-house, sleeping quarters etc, all beside the attractive River Tyne.

Then we found her again at the large **Corbridge** military supply depot not far away. Here is a small but very informative museum with some remarkable pieces, and a large excavated area, again helpfully explained. There are the remains of vast grain stores, on raised floors so that air might circulate. Hard-pressed for time, we headed for our next appointment at **Housesteads**.

Here, faced with a very steep climb to the fort on the wall, some of our group stayed at the kiosk and sat in the centre where information and photographs were available. Luckily, this area came free, so one anxious voice was stilled. ('I don't want to pay £3.50 to see more old stones!') It did help on many of our visits to be a member of the National Trust or English Heritage. Quite a few of us did make the climb, accompanied by the knowledgeable and humorous Mike Edbrooke of the National Trust.

The north wall of the fort was made of Hadrian's Wall itself, and it snakes away in each direction. The gate in this wall leads to 'Barbaricum'. Within the square fort we found the remains of a commandant's grand house, the usual strongroom, which had to be guarded at a narrow entrance as it could not be dug down into the rock. The most famous construction is the latrine building with a complex system of water supply and draining channels, and a place for cleaning your sponge on a stick (don't get hold of the wrong end) and a hand basin. The final drain leads past a small watchtower which needed water for cooking on its oven. Dear me!

Our last visit was made to nearby **Vindolanda**, with archaeologist Justin Blake. We could have spent hours listening to him describing his work and sharing his excitement at the finds made over the years. Of course, among the best-known are the Vindolanda 'tablets'. Some were made of wax on a bed of pine, scratched with a stylus. Others are made from birch or alder, often less than 1.5mm thick and written on in ink. They offer the fascinating human stories of those living on the Wall in Roman times. Only two



Housesteads on top of the Wall

days before our visit they had found the body of a girl, apparently murdered in Roman times: we wait for further news. We watched them wrapping up the dig for the end of the season, and then took the steep path to the fine museum, café, shop and garden, all in the little river valley below the excavation.

These Hadrian's Wall sites are worth another, longer visit. So is Corbridge. So is Hexham. We were, however, aware of how extending this trip would have added to the cost. Many of us plan to return to the area.

That evening we met for a final drink before dinner, with a chance to say thank

you to Robert Allen, our valiant leader. We said farewell next morning to our member from Cornwall, and set off for home. The sun shone on Sherwood Forest, so after lunch and saying goodbye to our four friends, there was a chance to visit the Major Oak, an ancient specimen which has seen so much of the history we had been traversing. Three people got lost in the forest (or taken by outlaws) but managed to reach the coach ahead of a search party. We actually got back to Sutton Hoo early.

See back page for details of next June's trip to Ireland.



Vindolanda: still digging after all these years

Working in the ship trench



The 'timber chapel' over the stern, showing the bus and the first hut in August 1965. All photos © Nigel Maslin

As the Society begins a project to record personal memories of Sutton Hoo and its excavations, NIGEL MASLIN recalls (in two parts) his own three summers in the ship trench as a volunteer in 1965, -6 and -7.

You would think it would be easy to find a ship under a mound, especially as in August 1965 Mound 1 was like the top of a trilby hat, cleaved by a deep karate chop, leaving the top of the ship trench all but visible under the bracken and rabbit holes. But in the panicky months of 1942, tracked vehicles had been run in and out of the trench for army training. Although it was soon stopped, the damage was done. When finally revealed, the starboard (southern) side of the stern was crushed inwards. So when a first exploratory trench was cut across where the stern should have been, it did not appear at quite the expected place or depth. One of the first finds, I seem to remember, was the cartridge case for a .303 bullet, which was duly logged and numbered. It came from an army slit trench which had been cut across the stern, destroying the traces of

the last three ribs (24, 25 and 26) as well as the steering platform.

The British Museum had guardianship of the finds which Edith Pretty had given to the nation, so the tasks of conserving and publishing them fell to the museum's Department of Medieval and Later Antiquities and its Keeper, Rupert Bruce-Mitford. So unexpected was the original discovery, and so hasty its conclusion in the shadow of war, that although the treasures had been carefully lifted from the burial chamber and the outlines of the ship fully exposed, the excavation of Mound 1 and the recording of the ship had never been completed in detail. Dr Bruce-Mitford particularly wanted to recover technical details about the building of the ship, to look for any sign of a tiller, or mast or oars, as well as looking beneath the ship, where there was a chance of other burials.

(In the event, hardly anything was found). There was also the matter of the mound itself and Basil Brown's spoil heaps.

The first excavation trench soon became a square, protected from rain by a polythene-covered wooden 'greenhouse' (nicknamed 'the timber chapel') built by Geoffrey Ingram Smith, who was then running the eponymous Woodbridge builders. He kept a 14-ton trawler on the Deben and took us all for a trip down the river – all in the interests of research, of course. His 'greenhouse' was built horizontally across the stern, inside the mound. That was fine until heavy rain simply poured off the roof and down through the sides of the trench. For the following season the only solution was a vast scaffolding with a ridge roof running down the length of the ship, channelling the run-off down the outside of the mound. Sandbags were still needed to control leaks and the sides of the mounds were shored up to clear the barrow-runs. These went along the sides of the ship trench, out to the spoil tips beyond the bow.

Working conditions were not always comfortable, but then you do not go on an archaeological dig for comfort. The heavy reinforced polythene sheeting shifted noisily in the wind and the drying sand blew about. Damp when cut, a neat section soon became an hour glass of trickling sand, measuring the time to its own extinction. Although the sheeting could be rolled up, you were either working in a wind tunnel or a greenhouse. Recommended dress, we used to say, was swimming things and an anorak. Despite the usual mix of British summer weather, I do not think we ever missed having a picnic lunch, sitting in tilted wheelbarrows or on the grass by the finds hut.



Yvonne Crossman and Mr Hipkin working on the survey



Gay Keiller with Rupert Bruce-Mitford



Keeping an eye on the channel: Geoffrey Ingram Smith aboard his trawler



Picnic lunch: Myrtle Bruce-Mitford (right) with Valerie Fenwick

Mike Bruce-Mitford takes over

The route to the site was the sandy track from the Sutton road, the one we all used before the National Trust took over. The British Museum had the right to excavate, but no actual right of access to the site, a tricky legal stand-off that made for difficult relations with the then owner of the Sutton Hoo Estate, Mrs Barton. She kept the Sutton Hoo Herd of prize Friesians and was paranoid about disease or disruption. We were only allowed to park cars along the track where the viewing platform now stands, as well as a small tool shed and an ancient single-decker bus to sit in. Zombie, the Bruce-Mitfords' Afghan hound, was strictly confined to their Ford Consul, and spent the days looking wistfully out of the windows. After the first year, a more substantial finds hut and general dig hut were sited beyond the bow. *Al fresco* lunch continued. Dr Bruce-Mitford always dreaded his annual diplomatic mission to charm Mrs Barton, because he was never confident of coping with the gin and tonic, and there were always sins to be atoned for and favours to ask.

His excavation team comprised his departmental staff, including Yvonne Crossman and his chief assistant Valerie Fenwick. The mounds were shaved of vegetation and a 6" contour survey carried out by Yvonne with the Ordnance Survey's Mr Hipkin, who had installed a bench mark under a fir tree on the edge of the track. The bronze age barrow expert, the late Dr Paul Ashbee of the University of East Anglia excavated the remains of the mound itself (see **Saxon 50**, 12) and later Dr Ian Longworth analysed the prehistoric evidence and excavated areas next to the mounds. The department's conservators under Peter Van Geersdaele were charged with making a plaster of Paris mould of the ship outlines, in sections that weighed four tons. Apart from the museum's programme of technical photography by Cary Miller, Mrs Gay Keiller volunteered to add general photographs of the excavation. A tripod of a tall ladder and two scaffolding poles overlooking the stern was replaced in the second year by

a hardly less perilous scaffolding tower dominating the middle of the site.

The first season of this 'continued' excavation of Sutton Hoo lasted only for the exploratory month of August, and had family support. Rupert's eldest daughter Myrtle, a professional cellist, with others reconstructed the lyre and his son Michael was usually on his father's digs too. Mike was a school friend of mine, and as I had already worked as a volunteer on some rescue digs in (Roman) London, I was asked too. Other volunteers were recruited locally and as we got to know them in subsequent years they provided the evening and weekend invitations that were the social highlights of the dig.

Paul Sieveking, founding editor of *Fortean Times*, introduced us to his father, Lance, a tall, elderly Yeatsian figure with white hair and a beaming face, who had flown in the First World War, written radio plays, and worked with E.M. Forster adapting his novels for the West End stage. He invited us round to his house one day and took us into his study. "I've been sitting in this room writing for forty years," he said. Behind the sofa was a trunk brought back by a close relative from (was it Afghanistan?) in the 1880s, since when it had not been touched.

I was fascinated listening to him describing the first television play ever broadcast, which he produced in 1930. In order to be 'televised', the actors had

to move in front of the static camera, but when they moved away, the signal would try to follow and create a blur (and he waggled his long bony fingers) so a disc had to be placed in front of the lens to refocus the signal.

And here we were, thirty-five years later, with another visitor to the dig, David Attenborough, chatting about how he was planning to spend a couple of million pounds on the new channel of which he was controller, and which would shortly go on air as BBC2. More than that, he had invited producer Paul Johnstone back into the fold, after the latter had fallen out with the formidable Grace Wyndham Goldie, head of BBC Television talks and later of the News & Current Affairs directorate. Working for the specialist archaeology programme *Chronicle*, Johnstone was determined to impress with *The Million Pound Grave*, a half-hour programme telling the story of the original 1939 discovery. He worked in 16mm. black-and-white film, with cameraman and sound recordist, and had the help of Valerie Fenwick to provide him with specialist research material. Johnstone interviewed many of the new generation of excavators and made a classic documentary that was revised in colour twenty years later.

TO BE CONTINUED: visits from Charles Phillips, Basil Brown and Benjamin Britten



Paul Johnstone (wearing cap, next to camera) interviews Paul Ashbee (in pork pie hat) for *The Million Pound Grave*

The Archaeology of Æthelred the Unready

'A seriously unpleasant period in which to live – for the English'. That was Professor Simon Keynes's judgment on the reign of Æthelred the Unready, in the third Sir David Wilson Lecture on 20 October. With Sir David in the audience, it was the opening of the new season of the Medieval Seminar, run jointly by the British Museum and the Institute of Archaeology, at the IoA in Gordon Square in London.

A generous handout gave us a series of maps showing the raids, invasions and occupations of the Viking armies that Æthelred had to contend with throughout his reign (978-1016). Raids by ship ravaged Thanet and the south-west coasts in the early eighties; by the early nineties, there were invasion forces of more than ninety ships and Viking armies wintering in England. Thorkell's army was in England from 1009-1012, then came Swein Forkbeards's invasion in 1013-14 and after only a brief intermission, Cnut.

Admitting that his sole contribution to archaeology was the uncovering of a fossilised Viking dog turd in North Uist, Prof. Keynes's serious purpose was to relate the two forms of evidence, archaeological and historical. Charters can be helpful, recording the military obligation of landholders and the repair of bridges and town walls, but they need amplifying.

There was a developed system of beacons, but they have provided no archaeology. Cadbury Castle in Somerset, an Iron Age hill fort, shows late 10th century and early 11th century developments, and Æthelred struck coins there. To quote David Wilson, 'with the mint went the administration', though frustratingly many coins come from unknown mints. Professor Keynes's handouts even illustrated the main coin types of the reign. Examples of Agnus Dei pennies of about 1009, with the lamb of God on the obverse and the dove representing the holy spirit on the reverse, 'bring a sense of the impact of the raids', said Professor Keynes, and of how they provoked this response which suggests a longing for peace.

19th century maps were notoriously scattered with the phrase 'Danish camp' on little or no evidence: they were as likely to be Iron Age as Viking. On the other hand, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* gives the impression that the Isle of Wight was used regularly by mercenaries throughout the 990s, yet there is little or no archaeological evidence so far. Professor Keynes suggested that sites such as

Carisbrooke Castle, whose outer enclosure may date to around 1000, might prove fruitful, and anywhere along the island's north coast.

Recalling the vividness of the accounts of the Battle of Maldon of 991 - whose site is a favourite day trip for this society - Professor Keynes described how he recently struggled through undergrowth on a Norfolk nature reserve to identify the site of the Battle of Ringmere of 1010 - not too difficult, because it is a circular mere and 'the most magical place I've been to for some time'. Again, there is no known archaeology, but the lake needs digging if it ever dries out.

Mass burials begin to yield important information. Bran Ditch in Cambridgeshire, ravaged by Thorkell in 1010, might be an execution cemetery. Another example was excavated two years ago in the grounds of St John's College, Oxford. Those thirty males in their prime, 'seriously hacked about', dismembered, decapitated or burnt, made Professor Keynes think of a recorded massacre of Vikings locked into a church that was then burned down.

Having looked in turn at defences, 'Danish camps', boundaries, battle sites and the mass graves, Professor Keynes concluded that such sites 'are opening our eyes to the grim reality of life in the reign of Æthelred the Unready, and to which archaeology can contribute'.



SUTTON HOO SOCIETY

NOTIFICATION OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Sutton Hoo Society will be held on Friday 25th February 2011 at 7.30pm in the Kings River Café at Sutton Hoo.

AGENDA

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of last AGM
3. Reports and Accounts
4. Election of Auditors
5. Election of Committee
6. Report on minor changes to Society Constitution

After the completion of the business meeting, there will be a presentation by Chris Fern of Fern Archaeology, including the reporting of results from the dating of finds from the Northern Cemetery at Sutton Hoo.

Michael Argent
Chairman

Donation to our archives

Last June a generous gift was presented to the Sutton Hoo Society by Mr John Piper of Hampshire. In the course of clearing out the effects of his late father David, he came across a complete boxed set of *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial* by Rupert Bruce Mitford, Keeper of Medieval and Later Antiquities at the British Museum.

The set of books was published by The British Museum between 1975 and 1983 in three volumes, the third of which is divided into two parts. The editing of the third volume is attributed to Angela Care Evans.

Apparently Mr Piper senior had a keen interest in archaeology and his son describes him as a regular reader of these volumes. That prompted him to contact the Society for advice about a new home for his father's books. As Chairman I suggested that the Society would be happy to accept them for its archive, so they are now in our possession and accessible to researchers and students.

On behalf of the Sutton Hoo Society I would like to thank Mr Piper very warmly for his generous gift.

Michael Argent
Chairman

A white knuckle ride

Dear Editor

Would it be possible to publish my 'thank-yous' in **Saxon**, to members of the Sutton Hoo Society who went on last September's Northumbria journey? At 84, and after a first-class fall with a week in hospital earlier this year, I no doubt foolhardily decided not to cancel my reservation for the trip. I would simply wait in the coach if I felt unable to keep up on any occasion.

However, thanks are due firstly to the noble efforts of Neil Montgomery and Mike Argent in pushing my 110 pounds - not huge, but not an insignificant weight - in Robert Allen's spare wheelchair, UP the steep hill to Durham Cathedral (our coach was unable to drive up because the road was torn up) and DOWN again in a white-knuckle ride. Secondly, apparently with more behind-the-scenes dealings, thanks to Ray Larsen for pushing me to the splendid Roman fort ruins on Hadrian's Wall. Thirdly, especially at Vindolanda - where even the local guide advised against wheelchairs, but where the walkway was luckily walkable on its curving smooth surface down, down, down (plus back up, up, up) to see the incredible finds of the digs - particular thanks to Janet Singleton, who as room-sharer and friend was irreplaceable throughout the memorable journey. Fourthly, but not least, thanks to the many who everywhere proffered an arm to lean on. Never have so few (namely one) owed so much to so many. Thank you all!

Rae Wright

(also a volunteer at Sutton Hoo Booksale shop)

The Million Pound Grave and the BFI

Dear Editor

I was interested to see the item in the last issue of **Saxon** about 'Tapping the Archive' - the BBC archive with old episodes of *Chronicle*. You mentioned disappointment that the programme about Sutton Hoo - *The Million Pound Grave* - was not available. I too am disappointed that it is not more easily available, it's not on-line, but you may not be aware that it is available to view at the British Film Institute's media centres. I just went and watched it at the centre in Cambridge. These centres are a bit thin on the ground, but if anyone is desperate to watch it then the Cambridge centre is probably the easiest to get to from Suffolk, as there is a direct train service from Ipswich. If anyone needs more information or directions they can contact me at my email address below.

Jon Skinner

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www.suttonhoo.org

A downland manor

The CBA has just published the results of the 2002-5 excavations at Bishopstone in the Sussex downs, which uncovered the 8th to early 11th century settlement next to St Andrew's church, with its complex of 'timber halls', unique cellared tower and forty-three burials. An early Anglo-Saxon settlement has already been excavated on nearby Rookery Hill, so it is known as a classic example of 'Middle Saxon shift' (in the nature and pattern of settlement).

Bishopstone was the first large-scale excavation of Dr Gabor Thomas of the University of Reading. At the Medieval

Seminar on 30 November, he described the preliminary results of his latest project at Lyminge, overlooking Romney Marsh in Kent. Lyminge is revealing the landscape of a 7th century monastic settlement, and another 'Middle Saxon shift': he promises to describe it for us in our next issue.

Thomas, Gabor (2010) *The later Anglo-Saxon settlement at Bishopstone: a downland manor in the making* (Council for British Archaeology) 280pp., £40. ISBN 978-1-902771-83-0

www.britarch.ac.uk/books/Thomas2010



Bishopstone © Gabor Thomas

A nobleman's ransom

In the latest issue of *The Antiquaries Journal*, Professor John Hines of Cardiff University suggests that at least some of the men around the owner of the great gold Sutton Hoo buckle (Rædwald?) could have estimated by eye the amount of gold it contained, and would have known that the king was wearing the life price of any noble in the hall. But was the buckle ever worn? It opens, but has no effective means of being fastened to a belt. The pattern of wear on its corners is consistent with its being held repeatedly face-down in the palm of the hand, so that the lid could be opened: its weight in the hand is very impressive.

That buckle is unique. Its original weight is close to the calculated 390g weight of the 300 *scillingas* of a Kentish nobleman's ransom. A Kentish freeman was valued at 100 *scillingas*, equivalent to the Crondall hoard of 101 *tremisses* (the only continental gold coin familiar in 7th century Britain). The solid gold belt buckle from Prittlewell weighs only 47.5g, compared with the 5 kilos of gold



Paul Mortimer shows the difficulty of wearing the (replica) Sutton Hoo buckle. Photo © Nigel Maslin

and 1.3 kilos of silver in the Staffordshire hoard, which equate to the wergild of thirteen noblemen.

Follow the arguments for a recognised value system in gold and silver in 7th century England in:

Hines, J. (2010) 'Units of Account in Gold and Silver in Seventh-Century England: *Scillingas*, *Sceattas* and *Pæningas*', *Antiquaries Journal*, 90, 153-73, where you will also find Stephen Dean et al., 'The Staffordshire Hoard: the Fieldwork', pp.139-152.

Events Diary

Wednesday 12 January, 10.00-13.00 *Sutton Hoo Studies*

First of twelve Wednesday morning seminars by Dr Sam Newton exploring the contents and contexts of the Sutton Hoo barrows

£15 + £1.50 coffee and biscuits

Further seminars on Jan 19, 26; Feb 2, 9, 16; Mar 2, 16, 23, 30; Apr 6, 13.

For details and bookings, contact Sam on 01728 688749

or email: samnewton@wuffings.co.uk

www.wuffings.co.uk

National Trust Sutton Hoo (NTSH)

Tuesday 18 January, 17.30 *Medieval Seminar*

Southumbrian book culture and the implications of recent archaeological discoveries

Lecture by Professor Michelle Brown

Room 612, Institute of Archaeology, 31-34 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY

Tuesday 8 February, 17.30 *Medieval Seminar*

The formation of a folk district in the kingdom of Kent: reinterpreting early Anglo-Saxon Eastry and its burials

Lecture by Dr Tania Dickinson

Room 612, Institute of Archaeology, 31-34 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY

Friday 25 February, 19.30 *SHS AGM and lecture*

Before Sutton Hoo: the prehistoric landscape and early Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Tranmer House

Lecture by Chris Fern of Fern Archaeology

Preceded by the half-hour SHS AGM

Admission free to members

NTSH, Restaurant

Saturday 12 March 14.30 *Suffolk Institute of Archaeology & History*

Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries at Boss Hall and the Buttermarket, Ipswich

Lecture by Chris Scull, Research Director, Conservation & Protection Group, English Heritage

Blackbourne Hall, Elmswell, near Woolpit, Suffolk

Saturday 26 March *NTSH Summer Exhibition opens*

Sunday 27 March
Volunteers' introduction to Summer Exhibition
Guides' Annual Briefing and lunch
National Trust Sutton Hoo (NTSH)

Saturday 7 May, 11.00 *Basil Brown Lecture*

Recent Anglo-Saxon Finds and what they mean to Sutton Hoo

Lecture by Professor Martin Carver

Tickets £6.50 (non-members £7.50)

Riverside Theatre, Woodbridge

Saturday 18 – Saturday 25 June *SHS Irish Journey*

By coach from Sutton Hoo, staying in Caernarfon on the first and last nights, and near Dublin during the week, where there will be one free day as well as visits to Trinity College for the Book of Kells and St Patrick's Cathedral; Glendalough; Russborough House; Newgrange and Bru Na Boinne megalithic site; and the Rock of Cashel.

Provisional price: £750 per person (£950 for single room)

Sunday 11 September, 10.00-16.00 *SHS INTERNATIONAL DAY CONFERENCE*

Sutton Hoo: a Swedish Perspective

A one-day conference sponsored by the Royal Carl Gustav Adolf Academy of Sweden and by History at the University Campus Suffolk and chaired by Professor Neil Price of the University of Aberdeen.

Tickets £30 (non-members £32.50, full-time students £27.50)

Waterfront Building, University Campus Suffolk, Ipswich

Saturday 1 October *In the steps of St Augustine: an SHS Day Excursion to Kent*

Augustine's Abbey, Bertha's Church and Canterbury Cathedral

Details to be announced

Sutton Hoo Opening Times & Events

Go to our website, www.suttonhoo.org and click on 'Online Resources' for links to the NTSH site

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Sutton
Hoo
Society**



www.suttonhoo.org

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