

Treasures from Sutton Hoo, The British Museum Press, 2011, 48 pp. 50 colour illustrations, pb £4.99, ISBN 978 0 7141 2825 2

Of coins and treasure

The British Museum has published a new picture book of Sutton Hoo treasures that makes a very useful introduction for visitors and a handy reference for guides. It is written by Dr Gareth Williams, the curator of early medieval coinage in the British Museum's Department of Coins and Medals. Dr Williams will be giving the Society's Basil Brown Memorial Lecture in Woodbridge on Saturday 12 May.

His subject will be *Coins, Hoards and Precious Metals in the Age of Sutton Hoo*. The interpretation of the crucial dating evidence of the coins in mound 1 is changing. Research in the 1970s moved the dating back from the mid 7th century to no later than 617, pointing to a burial date of 625, suitable for Rædwald. More recent work, writes Dr Williams in his new booklet, 'suggests a more cautious approach'. 'It seems unlikely that the latest coins in the hoard could date from any earlier than c.610 or much later than c.635.' The surprising wealth of the Staffordshire Hoard discovered in 2009 allows the possibility of the burial in mound 1 of lesser kings, like Rædwald's sons Rægenhere and Eorpwald, killed respectively in 617 and 627,

but Rædwald remains the favourite candidate.

The interpretation of the dating evidence of the coins often depends on comparison with continental hoards of Frankish coins and the dates of their import into England. The importance of gold and silver as part of a recognised value system, and the symbolic significance of treasures like the Sutton Hoo belt buckle - literally a prince's ransom - are all part of a new understanding of the burial deposit. To whet our appetite for Dr Williams's lecture, Mark Mitchels, the first editor of *Saxon*, will be talking rather more generally about *Treasure Hoards of East Anglia*, following our AGM at Sutton Hoo on 24 February. Details for both lectures are on the back page.

A Swedish perspective

The Society held its seventh conference on Sunday 11 September 2011 at the Waterfront Building in Ipswich. Sponsored by the Royal Gustav Adolf Academy of Sweden and generously facilitated by University Campus Suffolk, it featured six distinguished specialists, including four from Swedish universities, who gave us *Sutton Hoo: a Swedish Perspective*.

Our speakers outside the visitors' centre at Sutton Hoo the day before the conference (left to right): Professor Neil Price, Dr Torun Zachrisson, Professor Frands Herschend, Dr John Ljungkvist, Professor Anne-Sofie Gräslund, with Angus Wainwright. Photo Dr Rosemary Hoppitt (all other photos Nigel Maslin)



Paul Mortimer's retinue topped and tailed the day with greeting and farewell



Dr Sam Newton (left) with Paul Mortimer, admiring a reconstruction of the Sutton Hoo lyre



The details of the warriors' attire fascinated the delegates throughout the day.



*A question for Professor Neil Price (right) and Dr John Ljungkvist. After a welcome from chairman Mike Argent, Neil opened our conference with *An Eye for Odin*, demonstrating that the late iron age Roman and Swedish peoples were symbolically altering the eyes of their political and military leaders: "Sutton Hoo and Sweden are ideologically linked", he said. John discussed the development of the elite burial sites of Gamla Uppsala and Valsgärde, visited by the Society two years ago (see Saxon 50).*



Professor emerita Anne-Sofie Gräslund lecturing on the cremation graves of Valsgärde, a project on which she is working with John Ljungkvist



Dr Torun Zachrisson investigated the presence of exotic Byzantine Merovingian-period artefacts in the elite cremation burials of Gamla Uppsala in the 6th and 7th centuries



Professor Frands Herschend's surprisingly amusing lecture illuminated the way in which two of the Valsgärde graves in particular, from the 640s and 650s, would have been visited regularly before they were covered up, becoming a metaphor for death amid the life of the society at that time



Afternoon tea in the foyer followed an excellent selection of buffet lunch dishes



Mrs John Ljungkvist examining the metal working demonstration



Our president, Lord Cranbrook (right) closed the sell-out conference, after a conclusion by Angela Care Evans (second right). Remembering the ways in which Rupert Bruce-Mitford's publication of the ship burial in the 1970s drew on the contemporaneous Swedish sites, Angela asked 'where next?', suggesting how much is still to be learnt from comparative studies of the archaeological record.

In the steps of St Augustine



Martin Taylor in Bertha's chapel in St Martin's church. All photos Nigel Maslin

Your editor joined the Society's autumn excursion - a coach trip to Canterbury – on the first day of October last year, a surprisingly hot Saturday.

It is a unique experience to walk into an English country church and see an inscription reading, *In the Sixth Century Queen Bertha, with her Chaplain Bishop Liudard and St Augustine worshipped in this Church*. We were in St Martin's, on a low hillside in Canterbury with a direct view of the cathedral tower half a mile away, the first stop on our autumn excursion to Canterbury, 'in the steps of St Augustine'.

St Martin's is billed as the oldest church in continuous use in the English-speaking world, a part of the Canterbury World Heritage site. As Bede records (*Historia Ecclesiae* I.25), Bertha was a Christian Frankish princess, who had married king Æthelbert of Kent (in the 580s, when he was still heir) on condition that she could continue to practise her Christian faith. Bishop Liudard came with her as confessor.

Queen Bertha used to pray in St Martin's, continues Bede (I.26), an old church built during the Roman occupation. We were guided round it by Martin Taylor, author of the church guide book we bought, *The Cradle of English Christianity*. He pointed out the walls of Bertha's chapel, which form the western part of the chancel of the present-day church. It came as a shock to realise that we were in an extant, functioning church that predates the reintroduction of Christianity into England by Augustine's papal mission in 597. What happened when Augustine arrived, you can read in Bede I.25, where he also tells us that St Martin's was the place where the mission preached until Æthelbert's conversion, an event that had taken place by 601. "I can't think he would have been baptised anywhere but here", said Martin Taylor.



Listening to our English Heritage guide in the east end of the Norman nave of St Augustine's Abbey, where the plan of the underlying Anglo-Saxon church of St Peter and St Paul is also marked out

Our second stop was within easy walking distance. At first sight, St Augustine's Abbey is a typical 'Min. of Works' landscape mainly of preserved wall footings, but it held surprises. Beside the standing Romanesque north wall of the later monastery, we walked through the area of the vestibule and narthex of the early 7th century church of St Peter and St Paul, into the simple rectangular nave. There in the northeast corner lay the original place of Augustine's burial. Beside it, under a shelter, was the wall of the Porticus of St Gregory, built along the north wall of the church as side chapels to accommodate burials, in this case the first six archbishops of Canterbury. Along the south wall originally lay the early kings of Kent, their burial places since obliterated but still commemorated.

It was a very hot day – up to 29°C – so after a picnic lunch we were pleased to seek the cool of Canterbury Cathedral itself, with the most energetic taking their third guided tour in succession. The afternoon concluded with Evensong in the choir, before the two and a half hour coach trip back to Sutton Hoo, with our thanks to the indisposed Robert Allen for setting it up, treasurer Jonathan Abson for the organisation, and chairman Mike Argent for hosting a most enjoyable day.



The modern roof (centre) over the Porticus of St Gregory, the original burial place of the first seven archbishops of Canterbury



Resting in the shade of the 7th century St Pancras chapel, built of reused Roman bricks

The conversion of Britain and its archaeology

DIARMAID MacCULLOCH is Professor of the History of the Church at Oxford and received a knighthood in the New Year's Honours List. He is the author of *A History of Christianity* and presenter of the eponymous six-part series for BBC Television, and also President of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History. Here he reviews Malcolm Lambert's *Christians and Pagans: the Conversion of Britain from Alban to Bede*.

Fortunate is the reader seeking the story of early Christianity in Britain. At its heart is one of the greatest and most readable of medieval historians, the Venerable Bede, and its modern exponents include such engaging and stylish writers as Charles Thomas, Leslie Alcock and Henry Mayr-Harting. The literary sources have attracted much idiosyncratic talent, for they possess the fascination of a cryptic crossword in which one must sift fact from propaganda, post-Norman Conquest forgery from dimly glimpsed ancient original. At one pole, there is the sixth-century Welshman Gildas, whose gloomy rhetoric in *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* testifies to the survival of solid classical education after the Roman legions departed. At the other pole, six centuries later, stand the heroic liar Geoffrey of Monmouth, whose *Historia Regum Britanniae* conjured up Arthurian splendour from scrappy British memories that they had had a champion against the Saxons, and some ingenious Welsh bishops who, furious at the unholy alliance of Anglo-Saxon and Norman Johnny-come-latelies, consolidated their prestige and estates against the interlopers by inventing evangelistic exploits for ancient saints like Dyfrig or David. Malcolm Lambert is a judicious guide to the shifting opinions of scholars amid these quicksands, casting a sceptical eye even on Bede's motives for glorifying and sanitising the Roman mission to the Anglo-Saxons.

What makes Lambert's account so valuable, however, is the excellent use he makes of archaeological evidence. Advances in archaeology have been aided by the responsible use of metal detectors: once regarded with contempt by professionals, the evolution of sensible ground rules for their use has generated a vast auxiliary force of enthusiastic amateurs with a wide range of historical expertise. Our mania for building roads has helped too, thanks to the enlightened arrangements that now allow for excavations to take place before work begins. Consequently, the last century has witnessed an astonishing array of

new finds. The Sutton Hoo grave was the flagship: it was discovered on the eve of the Second World War, and in it we can say with reasonable certainty is interred King Raedwald of East Anglia, a familiar if ambiguous historical figure from Bede's account of the early years of the papal mission to England. In 2003, the richly caparisoned chamber-grave of another 6th to 7th century king, on whose eyes had been laid crosses in gold foil, was found in Prittlewell in Essex; he may reasonably be identified as King Saeberht of Essex (d. 617), who was the first of his line to convert to Christianity and made possible the institution of St Paul's Cathedral in London. Metal detecting has also given us the Staffordshire Hoard, discovered in 2009, whose five kilos of gold and over a kilo of silver have inspired more public excitement and regional pride than Sutton Hoo. Supplementing the hoard's array of military ostentation are gold crosses ruthlessly folded, maybe by an enemy of the Christian faith, together with a mysterious gold strip bearing a quotation from Numbers 10.35, which could have been part of the consecration jewellery of some great church of the conversion era.

The metal detectors have helped to reveal the existence of a peculiar religious artefact from Roman Britain, not found anywhere else in the Christian world: lead tanks, 20 of them so far, decorated with Christian symbols and occasionally scenes of prayer or baptism. They are clearly fonts, and raise many enjoyable puzzles. Why do some sites yield more than one? Why have so many been damaged? If they were intended to be portable, why create an object which would take at least four men to carry? We may imagine them trundling on a cart along the roads of late Roman Britain, no doubt escorted with much ceremony. And then from motives which are irrecoverable (perhaps sectarian strife – misuse by Pelagian heretics?), they seem to have been solemnly retired, rendered incapable of further use by mutilation, and buried at some hallowed site: three were found near what looks like a Roman church building at Icklingham in Suffolk.



Professor Sir Diarmaid MacCulloch. Photo BBC

Before there were archaeologists, people were intrigued by the standing stones of early Christian Britain, and they sometimes generated place names: we can visit Valle Crucis in Denbighshire, in the shadow of the ninth-century Eliseg's Pillar, with its long, boastful dynastic inscription for the king of Powys, a monument already venerable when Cistercian monks arrived in the valley; or the Cumbrian equivalent, Crossdale, first attested in 1294; or the more picturesquely corrupt Crouch End in north London. Despite the Reformation, these islands remain crowded with early Christian crosses. I especially relish one of the least known, at Great Ashfield in Suffolk, which has stood in shady seclusion in a gentleman's garden since 1786, when it was rediscovered after being recycled during the Reformation: having cast it down as a monument of superstition, Tudor churchwardens put it to good Protestant use as a bridge over a stream into the churchyard. As a result, one side of it is worn perfectly smooth,



A folded gold cross from the Staffordshire hoard. Photo Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery.



The chi-rho symbol behind the head of Christ on the 4th century mosaic from Hinton St Mary, Dorset. Photo British Museum

while the other preserves scrolls as intricate as the Lindisfarne Gospels.

The Great Ashfield cross's now agonisingly illegible inscription is unusual in its region, for, as Lambert notes, in a millennium-long geographical peculiarity yet to be explained, eastern England is short of epigraphy from the centuries between Claudius and William the Conqueror. By contrast, in Wales, Cornwall and Ireland, brief stone-cut inscriptions remain in abundance: for instance, in Llansadwrn on Anglesey one celebrates the church's patron saint, 'beatus Saturninus', whose story was of no use to later empire-building Welsh bishops, and is therefore lost to us. The Irish had their own script called ogham, invented before they became Christians, and wonderfully practical in a world where there was no paper, and parchment cost a fortune, since its alphabet consists of arrangements of short lines, cut against a straight edge of wood, ivory or stone. It was as good for the blind as for the sighted: a Celtic braille. It can be found wherever Irish Christians travelled, not

simply on their own island but in Scotland and Wales too, and it reveals that Irish Christians, unlike the Welsh and the Cornish, felt that their own language was just as good as Latin for solemn religious commemoration.

In the Scottish Highlands, the people whom the Romans dubbed the Picts also used ogham and generally despised Latin, the language of their enemies. Their own Brittonic language is now almost entirely lost to us, thanks to the ninth-century conquest by the Irish (Christian) kingdom of Dál Riata. Equally mysterious is the Picts' rich symbolic language, which they continued to use, once they had converted to Christianity, to produce magnificently hybrid monuments whose designs even the dourest Presbyterian iconoclast could not easily square with popery, and which thus frequently escaped defacement. Not religious fanatics but 19th-century builders destroyed the monumental procession of carved bulls at the Pictish fortress of Burghead on the Moray Firth, and we can still be intimidated and baffled by the grinning man brandishing an axe

depicted on the reverse side of a cross-slab from Craigton near Golspie in Sutherland. Evidently, Picts saw no conflict between the two sides of that monument, for there are at least 57 surviving examples of such stones, cheerfully marrying pre-Christian and Christian iconography.

These are the raw materials of Lambert's enjoyable new study, an ambitious attempt to tell the story of Christianity from its earliest traces in Britain until the 8th century, by which time the whole archipelago was at least nominally converted. Lambert begins with the steady consolidation of British Christianity in the later Western Roman Empire, in which the two provinces of Britannia were an outlying but prosperous and important possession. We know virtually nothing of the Church's earlier phase, apart from one or two martyr stories about Roman soldiers who resisted 3rd century imperial persecution. There is nothing implausible about these: Saint Alban inspired a long-lived cult that resided in the town the Romans had called Verulamium and that, most unusually,



St Augustine's chair (c.1205) in Canterbury Cathedral. Photo Nigel Maslin

was not despised by the Anglo-Saxons; Saint Julius and Saint Aaron, martyred at Caerleon in South Wales, sound convincing because that strange second name is paired with one of the commonest names among legionaries. None of the three martyred legionaries is likely to have been a local. Britannia's Christianity long remained a religion of wannabe Romans in country villas and, to a lesser degree, of urban tradespeople. While there is a curious dearth of Christian finds from Roman London, the distribution of small finds suggests that the Church's strength was concentrated in the South-East and along the South coast. Apart from the martyr stories, and the presence of three bishops from Britannia's cities at one of Constantine I's empire-wide councils in 314, all the evidence we have is from the era after Constantine's successors began to favour the Church rather than traditional religion, and thrust the older cults aside.

The earliest known occurrence of the word 'Christian' in Britain is compelling: a certain Annianus, angry at the theft of his purse, offered a curse tablet to the goddess

Sulis at Bath enlisting her aid against the thief 'whether gentilis or Christian, man or woman, boy or girl, slave or free'. Annianus was clearly not a Christian himself, or he would hardly have wasted his money on Sulis, but he was living in a 4th century society already consciously dividing itself between Christian and non-Christian, and increasingly adopting the Christians' condescending term for those who weren't believers (for 'Gentile', read 'pagan'). The imperial backing for Christianity was symbolised by the 'chi-rho' symbol – the first two letters of Christ's name in Greek combined as a monogram – apparently invented by Constantine in the course of his successful military campaigns. This striking device, with no precedent in scripture or early Christian tradition, became an all-pervasive symbol of imperial Christianity in the fourth century, appearing on the small change of imperial coinage in the purses of people like Annianus. It also appeared scratched on tiles, or as an ornament on silver dishes and those lead fonts, and it long outlived the departure

of the Roman legions as a symbol on the monuments of British Christians anxious to emphasise their enduring Romanitas – even in 6th century Whithorn on the Solway Firth, beyond the now abandoned Hadrian's Wall.

One intriguing feature of British Christianity is that, far from fading away after 410 along with hypocausts and decent flooring, it spread beyond the imperial frontiers into Ireland and southern Scotland. Latin inscriptions multiplied, and more and more cemeteries were marked by that peculiarly Christian care given to proper burials for infants and children. The most charismatic name to survive this ill-documented period is that of Saint Patrick, who left texts, no less precious for being written in imperfect Latin, that cast some brilliant shafts of light on a turbulent but expanding Church. He tells us the name of his home town, 'Bannavemtaberniae', the identity of which has provoked much debate. Many now believe that it was probably one of the little settlements along Hadrian's Wall, where the fort and settlement of

Birdoswald are known to have been called Banna, encouraging the rearrangement of a garbled name into a very feasible 'Banna Venta Berniae'. Lambert discounts this theory and places Patrick's home in South-West England, but the one argument that he puts forward, the scarcity of villas around Birdoswald that match Patrick's description of his home as *avillula*, is contradicted by his own later note that Birdoswald boasts signs of a substantial chieftain's house converted from the former military granary.

As intriguing is the question of what form Christianity took after the Anglo-Saxons overwhelmed the population with their gene-pool and language. Was there a coherent Church left when Augustine of Canterbury arrived in 597 on his mission from Rome? The historian Rob Meens has made provocative observations on the correspondence between Augustine and his patron, Pope Gregory I, about policy in the newly established Kentish mission. Gregory argued at great length against those who had been perplexing Augustine with their strong opinions about what constituted sexual uncleanness. These rigorists wanted to apply Old Testament exclusions from participation in the temple liturgy to pregnant women and married couples who had recently had sex, to keep them out of church while the pollution lasted. Clearly, these troublesome people were Christians, since non-Christians would have no interest in and presumably no knowledge of the Old Testament. The Roman missionaries were coming up against a significant body of well-informed local Christians with standards different from their own. Lambert decides that these people were Gauls rather than Britons, but he undermines his case by recounting another significant story about Augustine: when approached by British Christians wanting to find out more from this well-educated Roman about their ancient saint Sixtus, Augustine denied that Sixtus had ever existed. Pope Gregory had told him to suppress the cult around the saint, sending the bones of a more 'authentic' namesake, Pope Sixtus II, from the catacombs in Rome as consolation. Not only does this show that there were British Christians doing their best to find an accommodation with the new missionaries, but that Augustine and Gregory treated them with sneering hostility. The pope bluntly told Augustine that while he must treat Gaulish bishops with deference, British bishops were committed directly to his charge, 'to instruct the unlearned, to strengthen the weak and correct the misguided'.

Inevitably, there is a faultline in Lambert's narrative between the Christianity that survived from the Roman

period and the new Roman initiative. Both Augustine's missionaries and their later champion Bede were concerned to stress the differences that caused friction between Celt and Anglo-Saxon, such as clashing traditions in clerical hairstyles (shave off all the front if you're Celtic, just a little patch on the top if you're Roman) and the crucial question of how to decide the date of Easter. The tangle is still intricate even in Bede's narrative. He praised certain non-Anglo-Saxon Christian pioneers from the North and West, such as the indisputably great Columba of Iona; Fursey, the Irish evangelist of eastern England; and the very early Uinniau of Whithorn, whose name he or his assistants managed to mistranscribe as Nynia (thanks to Aelred of Rievaulx, Nynia further descended into the uneuphonious Ninian). Almost invariably, these figures had the advantage of not being British or Welsh – in other words, they came from lands on which Anglo-Saxons had no territorial designs. Bede and other Anglo-Saxon clergy members took a much harsher view of their fellow Christians in Anglo-Saxon territories or Wales, such as the unfortunate monks of Bangor-is-Coed, who committed the cardinal sin of praying for a British Christian king rather than an Anglo-Saxon pagan one, and were briskly butchered for this faux pas; or the only marginally luckier British priests whose churches were given away to Bishop Wilfrid by King Ecgfrith of Northumbria after the Northumbrians had chased them out in the 670s. There was quite a lot of fancy theological footwork to perform if such attitudes were to have any moral plausibility, hence Bede's argument that British Christians had been punished by God for their selfishness in refusing to convert the Anglo-Saxons who had overrun their country. This was an early shot at dealing with a problem that became steadily more insoluble through the medieval period, as all western Europe accepted not just Christianity but a form of it that involved allegiance to the bishop of Rome. Why did these Catholic Christians persist in killing each other despite their shared creed of love? Not even the Reformation stopped Catholics being beastly to one another.

For 60 years or so, the English mission sputtered erratically through the various kingdoms of Angles and Saxons, and grasping what happened is not helped by the excess of Eadbalds and Aethelburhs. Suddenly, in the year 666 (let paranoid Protestants take note of that number) the pope seized the initiative once more, when the Anglo-Saxon candidate for the archbishopric of Canterbury happened to die of plague while visiting Rome.

Pope Vitalian made a bold substitution: a Greek-speaker from distant Tarsus in Asia Minor, called Theodore. Rome was inclined to feel that Easterners like Theodore were too clever by half, and a promotion to Canterbury may have been a convenient way of getting an unpredictable theologian as far away from Rome as possible. Theodore arrived accompanied by a papal minder, the equally exotic Hadrian, a refugee monk from North Africa. Between them, they transformed the English Church, though they had serious competition: there were episcopal giants in the land in those days, notably Wilfrid, Chad and Cuthbert, none of them disposed to play second fiddle. Theodore, however, had the personality and the prestige to arbitrate between kings. When he called the Council of Hertford in 672, it was as a Church leader who ignored the boundaries of the kingdoms of Hwicce, Mercia, Wessex, Northumbria or whatever other frontiers the British might seek to maintain: his Church represented an island entity that was as yet nameless, but which had one stimulus to unity in its common allegiance to the faraway Vicar of Peter in Rome.

One might say that the papacy, or its inspired historian Bede, invented the English, who two centuries later duly found themselves with a single kingdom of the English, or of England. But by the ninth century, Lambert's tale is long done. Effectively, it ends in the 680s, with the submission of the last non-Christian enclave of any significance in this archipelago, the Isle of Wight, whose acceptance of the Good News from the swashbuckling Bishop Wilfrid was encouraged by a massacre at the hands of the dubiously Christian warlord Caedualla of Wessex. It was not a happy end to the century of conversion, and Bede is patently uneasy about it, though its outcome was a welcome distraction from having to say too much about the constant contemporary friction between the various church leaders in Theodore and Wilfrid's generation. But we only know *l'affaire Wight* took place because Bede tells us about it. So who are we to criticise?

References

Christians and Pagans: The Conversion of Britain from Alban to Bede by Malcolm Lambert Yale, 329 pp, £30.00, September 2010, ISBN 978 0 300 11908 4

This review first appeared in the *London Review of Books* on 2 June last year.

From Newgrange to Glendalough - the Society's trip to Ireland



Among the passage graves of Knowth, with organiser Robert Allen bringing up the rear.
Photo Michèle Abson



The Knowth macehead. Photo National Museum of Ireland

The Society's trip to Ireland last summer, from 18-25 June, took a couple of dozen members to some very varied historical and archaeological sites within reach of their base in Dublin. PAULINE MOORE was surprised to discover inter-relating themes and symbols that helped her understanding of Ireland's changing cultures: Neolithic, Celtic, Viking and Christian.

The Neolithic passage-tombs of Newgrange and Knowth are introduced in a first-class exhibition at Brú na Bóinne (the 'Bend in the Boyne' north of Dublin), accompanied by a clear audio-visual explanation of the winter solstice. We then move into a replica of the Newgrange passage, into the 'cave' – the original was hewn 5,000 years ago, from greywacke with stone tools. We stand silently in darkness, until a shaft of light is beamed straight into the space, and spreads to 17cm. No-one says 'wow': we all gasp. It is awe-inspiring. If the sun was obscured, perhaps by storm, would they have thought their gods had abandoned them? This was a real experience.

So was the tour of the mound of Knowth, just over the River Boyne, where an expert guide showed us the symbols carved in the rocks around its base. Analysis suggests that these spirals demonstrate the movement of the planets and that the place became a sort of Stone Age university to teach people cosmology: all this before the Pyramids, and before Stonehenge. It was thrilling to enter the low passage and stand in the chamber inside one half of the circular mound; to consider the possible implications of the

red and white flint 'mace-head'; to talk of fertility symbols – there is a slender, penile shaft aiming towards this womb-like tomb, from the other side of the mound. Similar passage-tombs occur elsewhere in Europe and even in Mexico.

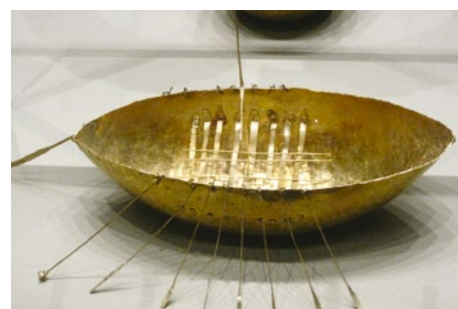
Move from stone and sky to metal. Given a free day in Dublin, most people spent at least a few hours in the National Museum of Archaeology. Space does not permit detail, but the Irish know how to display and inform in exciting ways. One floor has a boundary of items from Neolithic to Bronze Age: from a huge, oak log-boat, via the Knowth 'mace-head', to showing the development of metalwork for domestic and military use.

The centre of this floor housed presentations of Irish Gold, dating between 2,200 and 600 BC, most from bog deposits: many torcs, disc brooches, collars, lock rings, necklaces, finely crafted; amber and jet necklaces; a jeweller's tools. Many of the spiral patterns recalled those we had seen carved in stone.

In a side room is the account of Kingship and Sacrifice: from the Bronze and Iron Age periods, this lays out the duties of a king to protect and feed his people, exacting loyalty in return. Did you know that they

knelt to suckle a Celtic king's nipples as an act of submission? In each of three spirally-enclosing walls lies a 'bog body', each found in a significant boundary position. One has his nipples cut off – was this a disgraced king, a rival? It makes one quite uneasy to view these people: eyes closed, hands twisted, hair sprawling, brown, leathery skin. Were they punished, sacrificed? Each had eaten a last meal of some cereal dish. Symbols of kingship included a stag, snake and ram's head.

The Treasury houses unique pieces, starting with a stone head carved with



A model of an ocean-going vessel made in beaten sheet gold in 1st century BC, from the Brougher hoard, Co. Derry. (National Museum of Ireland, no. IA:1903.323.2) Photo Michèle Abson

three faces, a huge bronze horn, and the Broighter Hoard of gold. These votive offerings include the beautiful little gold ship, which seemed to embody the whole spirit of our journey. Clear expository panels traced the growth of Irish art and jewellery as ‘Celtic’ ornamentation spreads from Germanic Europe, Britain and Pictish Scotland to take a firm hold in Ireland. Then come the Christians from Rome, and the Vikings, all with their influences. The Tara Brooch, the Ardagh Chalice, crosiers, the Cross of Cong: these show how animals like boar, snake, ram, dragon intermingle with images of the Trinity and the Crucifixion.

This Museum, like the Dublinia, near the Christchurch Cathedral provide vivid displays of Viking Dublin. This was the first place to be used as a foreign base by the Vikings. One drawing scratched on timber shows a man on lookout from the mast of a longship.

Our visit to the Rock of Cashel showed us how the power struggles of kings and bishops evolved. This was the 5th century seat of the Kings of Munster (a later one was baptised here by St. Patrick) until given to the church. We entered a beautifully carved and painted Vicars Choral House; a large (now partly ruined) cathedral; and we saw one of several tall, pointed towers on our journey. One archbishop survived the reign of Elizabeth I by being simultaneously Catholic and Protestant. An excellent guide held us riveted in gale and rain – we retreated to the friendly town for a real Guinness.

Another unforgettable highlight was Trinity College, where the superbly illuminated late 8th century manuscript of the Gospels, the Book of Kells is excellently displayed. We saw two copies

of it, together with the Books of Durrow and of Armagh. Each object touched by the monk stood for something: the parchment is a pure conscience; his ruler is the Will of God; the split nib of the quill shows your love of God and of your neighbour; the writing desk stands for tranquillity of heart, and so on, including the glorious colours, which are the multiform grace of heavenly wisdom. Creatures and plants writhe amongst the circles and spirals we have seen in jewellery and carvings.

Climb to the floor above and you are in the breath-taking Old Library, whose towering roof beams and windows enclose thousands of leather-bound books and a central exhibition. We saw one on medieval medicine and its development, with gory details.

In Co. Wicklow, the 18th century Russborough House provided a contrast through the art collection of Sir Alfred Beit: beautiful porcelain, glass, fine paintings, carpets and furniture, under ornate ceilings. Tall windows give views to sweeping, open ground and a tranquil lake, enjoyed by cattle.

Glendalough in the Wicklow Mountains, standing in a lovely, winding valley with two lakes, is the monastic site founded by St. Kevin, a 6th century saint, who sought solitude. A soft-speaking guide led us through increasing showers from one ancient chapel to another, set about with carved crosses, and we saw another tall, pointy tower. Our attention was drawn to the young oak trees planted by the crew of the Sea Stallion, the replica longship which sailed from Roskilde in Denmark to Ireland and back in 2009. When the ship came to Dublin it was brought to the lake at Glendalough,

winched by a crane: goodness knows how they did it, we had enough trouble manoeuvring a coach.

Even in clouds of midges, several of us enjoyed a four-mile walk to the lakes and back, soaking up the very Irish mixture of natural and religious symbolism, not to mention the rain. A red stag grazed in a marshy meadow, his hinds sheltering under a tree nearby. We saluted him, of course.

A ship was the finest feature of our last visit, to Waterford Crystal in its splendid new home in the city centre. Fascinated, we watched the teamwork involved in creating even a simple piece, but then we found two master-craftsmen about to complete the putting together of an exquisite Viking longship: this will be about the length of a man’s forearm, and is shaped, cut and etched with unparalleled craftsmanship. Tiny, slender oars, tall mast, steering oar, and curved sail – all in crystal. This is almost beyond price, and is the epitome of glassmaking in the same way the prehistoric gold ship was – or the Tara Brooch.

The Irish are rightly proud of their culture, and we are in no doubt about the artistry, skill and eye for beauty passed on over the centuries and still alive. Thank you, Robert Allen, for arranging for us to share so many enthralling experiences.

Further reading:

Glendalough, City of God (eds.) Charles Doherty, Linda Doran and Mary Kelly (Dublin, Four Courts Press, June 2011, 448pp. ISBN 978 1 84682 170 7). Lavishly illustrated, based on lectures given to the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland and at Glendalough.



The walk by the lakes at Glendalough. Photos this page Nigel Maslin

The round tower at Glendalough.

The best of guides



Mike Weaver, everyone's favourite Sutton Hoo guide. Photo Archant

Mike Weaver, history teacher, lecturer and Sutton Hoo guide, died just before Christmas at the age of 70. He was the first honorary secretary of the Sutton Hoo Society, chairman of the Woodbridge Tide Mill Trust, and sometime mayor of Woodbridge. Here, MARK MITCHELS, his committee colleague for many years, explains why his enthusiasm, knowledge and warm personality will be so sorely missed.

As head of history at Woodbridge School Mike was inevitably drawn to Sutton Hoo. His predecessor, Vincent B. Redstone was the person who put Mrs Pretty in touch with Basil Brown. Although he was already heavily involved in the affairs of Woodbridge Tide Mill, Mike could not resist the excitement created when the Sutton Hoo site was re-examined in the 1980s. He threw himself into the newly formed Friends and brought to all the meetings his love of Anglo-Saxon culture and his delight in presenting the site to an entirely new generation of the public.

Mike is credited with the much quoted phrase, 'page one of English history' and it encapsulated the fascination he found whenever he walked across the field and began his stint as a guide. He shared with many of us the extraordinary excitement of knowing we were standing where it all began.

Being a guide was a challenge back in the 1980s: the site was bereft of all the attractions and comforts found there today. Mike would walk beside the potato field, open the tiny wooden shed (containing two post cards and a British Museum guidebook) and then just wait to see if any people joined him. Of course they did, because he soon had an enviable reputation as the must-have guide. He made groups feel that they were important, and that together they could create magic. Once on the mound he would persuade some hapless visitor

to lie down in the centre of the boat and then with humour and enthusiasm reveal the Sutton Hoo story. 'On your imaginary forces work' perfectly explains why he was so good. Year after year societies and educational groups would assemble on the site having insisted that Mike should be their guide. They were never disappointed, however awful the weather, as he always gave a terrific performance. He was incapable of being dull.

During the years when the site was being excavated by Professor Martin Carver and his colleagues, Mike enthusiastically broadened his material to include whatever work was in progress. He realised very early on that the 'sand men' were a bonus – the public could not get enough of these shadowy figures who were united only in the cruel and nightmarish methods of their deaths. He was an actor who relished that moment in the drama when he dragged the lid from the grave and drank in the gasps as another group embraced an indelible memory.

When the Duke of Edinburgh became the Society's patron it was a massive lift to morale. He was said to be careful about the things he supported as he always gave them his best attention, encouraging sponsors and important interests. The summer day in 1987 when the duke paid us a visit was hugely important. He was joined by the Trustees of the British Museum including David Attenborough; Friends and guests

SUTTON HOO SOCIETY

NOTIFICATION OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Sutton Hoo Society will be held on Friday 24 February 2012 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

Following the business meeting, Mark Mitchels will talk about Treasure Hoards of East Anglia.

Michael Argent
Chairman

mingled on the mounds, enjoying a splendid buffet and sharing their love of this special place. Mike was absolutely determined to meet the duke, and when it was clear this would require a bit of elbowing and tenacity a new Mike appeared. He propelled himself towards the great man and there they stood, chatting and laughing for quite a long time. He never ceased to laugh about his achievement that day. Later he added to his Royals-at-Sutton-Hoo file when he featured in a television series and was chosen to show Prince Edward over the site.

Throughout the modern story of Sutton Hoo Mike Weaver was a loyal and enthusiastic supporter, offering his many skills when they were needed. He was one of the team who helped to prepare the exhibition hall for the first visitors and even as his illness drew on his strength he continued to take parties on tours. His wife Carol, who died just months before him, was beside him throughout his marvellous career and her loss, which he bore with exceptional courage and humour, proved the final blow.

Mike was a lovely person who adored history and saw his mission in life as communicating that love to the people he met. He had exceptional skills and it is impossible to imagine Woodbridge without him. But we must learn to do so, and treasure the contribution he made to our community over so many years.

Events Diary

*Medieval Seminar

Lectures marked with an asterisk are part of the Medieval Seminar jointly convened by Professor Andrew Reynolds of the Institute of Archaeology and Dr Sonja Marzinzik of the British Museum, who kindly invite SHS members to attend. Lectures begin at 17.30 at the Institute of Archaeology, 31-34 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY. smarzinzik@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk

†Wuffing Education

Wuffing Education events are study days held at National Trust Sutton Hoo (NTSH). They cost £38 and last from 10.00 to 16.30. Booking is essential on 01394 386498 or cliff@wuffingeducation.co.uk. For more information and the full list of events, visit www.wuffingeducation.co.uk

Dr Sam Newton continues his series of weekly seminars at NTSH, based on the Sutton Hoo treasures, every Wednesday throughout January, February and March (except 15 February), 10.30-13.00, cost £15. To enrol email samnewton@wuffings.co.uk, further details at www.wuffings.co.uk where dates for the summer seminars will appear later.

†Saturday 4 February, 10.00-16.30 *Sutton Hoo and the Goths*

Dr Sam Newton

*Tuesday 7 February, 17.30 *Dublin before Duiblinn: combs and early settlement*

Dr Ian Riddler

Friday 24 February, 19.30 SHS AGM and lecture, NTSH *Treasure Hoards of East Anglia*

Mark Mitchels

Preceded by the half-hour SHS AGM

*Tuesday 6 March, 17.30 *Landscapes of Governance: Anglo-Saxon Assemblies*

Prof Andrew Reynolds and Dr Stuart Brookes

†Saturday 17 March, 10.00-16.30 *The Irish Church in Eastern England: St Fursey and St Cedd*

Dr Sam Newton

†Saturday 24 March, 10.00-16.30 *An Introduction to the Archaeology of Middle Saxon England c.650-850* Paul Blinkhorn

EALDFEDER Anglo-Saxons

will be performing at Sutton Hoo on May 6-7 and 26-27, June 23-24, July 28-29, August 4-5: more details at www.ealdfaeder.org

Saturday 28 April Ealdfaeder Warrior Workshop, NTSH

How to fight with spear, axe, sword, slingshot & archery.

Limited places, booking essential via National Trust

Saturday 5 May Ealdfaeder Storytelling, NTSH

With Oswine of Gippeswic, for adults and children

*Tuesday 8 May, 17.30 *The Roman-Saxon Transition: new evidence from excavations at St Martin-in-the Fields*

Alison Telfer

Saturday 12 May, 11.00 Basil Brown Memorial Lecture *Coins, Hoards and Precious Metals in the Age of Sutton Hoo*

Dr Gareth Williams (British Museum)
Riverside Theatre, Woodbridge, Suffolk
Tickets £7, non-members £8, from Jonathan Abson (address in next column).

Saturday 8 September SHS Autumn Outing: *Southwestern approaches to East Anglia*

Led by Dr Sam Newton, this coach trip will include Devils Dyke (an ancient barrier between East Anglia and Mercia or some of the smaller tribes) Bartlow Hills and Hadstock Church, with its considerable Anglo-Saxon associations: further details in the July Saxon.

Sutton Hoo Opening Times & Events

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

The Sutton Hoo Society



www.suttonhoo.org

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