



The Newsletter of the Sutton Hoo Society

SAXON

President: The Earl of Cranbrook

No.35 / 2001



Above: Members and friends of the Sutton Hoo Society on the burial mound at Taplow Court, the site of the princely burial excavated in 1883

Right: The view from the mound across the Thames valley showing its prominent position above the flood plain

(Photographs: R. Hoppitt)



SOCIETY VISIT TO THE TAPLOW BURIAL MOUND

On Sunday 28 October Sutton Hoo Society members and friends travelled to Taplow Court near Maidenhead in Buckinghamshire, west of London. The contingent from Suffolk travelled by coach, and we were delighted to meet with members and friends from other parts of the country – and overseas – to discover more of the site of the 'princely' Anglo-Saxon burial which had been excavated in 1883 and was, until the excavation of 1939 at Sutton Hoo, the most spectacular to have been found.

Taplow Court is a conference and education centre run by Soka Gakkai International, a Japanese Buddhist organisation, and we are very grateful to them for allowing us to visit.

The weather was perfect, and we were

welcomed by Angela Bolger, the curator, and John Fagence, one of their guides.

The visit began with a lecture by Leslie Webster from the British Museum who has been re-evaluating the material from the 19th century excavation. We then visited the site of the burial mound itself, which sits impressively high up on the river cliff overlooking the Thames Valley to the west. Following this we went into the house to see the exhibition which covers the history of the house as well as the Anglo-Saxon burial, and includes replicas of the finds and a reconstruction of the burial.

Thanks go to Leslie Webster for giving up her Sunday afternoon to us and to committee member Brenda Brown for organising the event.

A resume of the lecture is enclosed with this edition of SAXON

More details about the Taplow archaeological site — including the earlier Iron Age fort — can be found at:

www.indigogroup.co.uk/edge/taplow.htm

see also: **Current Archaeology** No 175

www.archaeology.co.uk/issues/ca175/taplow

The house, exhibition and grounds are open for visits by the public on Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays from Easter to mid-August between 2pm and 6pm.



Left: Bapsey Pond, Taplow Court. Legend has it that the pond was used as a place of baptism by the early church. The pond is downslope from the spring which feeds it, the burial mound, and the site of the former Anglo-Saxon church

(Photograph: R. Hoppitt)



Above: The view across the Thames valley from the site of the burial mound (Photograph: Sue Banyard)

Late Medieval Kiln at Little Haugh by John Newman

During the monitoring of soil stripping operations and subsequent excavations for a drainage pipe, evidence was revealed of a pottery production site close to the River Deben and Sutton Hoo on the Sutton/Bromeswell parish boundary at Little Haugh.

While no definite kiln structure was identified on the site, a large quantity of pottery wasters were recovered of 15th to early 17th century date. In addition a number of peg tiles were collected which had spots of glaze on one side. Comparison with other sites in the county suggests that they may well have been used in the construction of a kiln. In addition, a large amount of charcoal was observed across the area of the pottery and tile scatter, indicating activities which required high temperature operations consistent with firing pottery.

The significance of the find is that this is the first late medieval/Tudor pottery production site found in south-east Suffolk. Most of the kilns so far found are located in the Waveney Valley and Rickinghall area in north and east Suffolk.

Times Remembered by Don Black

Basil Brown's involvement in the archaeology of Suffolk, and the spectacular find in 1939 at Sutton Hoo in particular, has given him a permanent place in British history. He died in 1977 aged 89 at his home in Rickinghall, a village that meanders along the old East-West Suffolk county border. As a cub reporter with the *East Anglian Daily Times*, I first met him in 1947 at Calke Wood which covers some 24 acres on the Rickinghall boundary with Wattisfield and almost in sight of the ancient Henry Watson pottery that still continues in business. Stanley Mole, who is 94 and lives with his family in a bungalow at the wood, told me earlier this year that he remembers Basil picking up 'bits and pieces' in nearby fields 70 years ago. Basil, sponsored by Watson's, excavated prehistoric hearths and Romano-British kilns in and around Calke Wood. Edith Pretty, the owner of Sutton Hoo, invited Basil in 1938 and 1939 to open the tumuli on her land. He worked all the daylight hours, made meticulous notes and cycled 35 miles home to Rickinghall every other weekend or so.

Having returned to the *East Anglian*, an idea occurred to me in 1964 to re-create his bike journey to mark the 25th anniversary of his great discovery. Suffolk is not as flat as people think and with Basil aged 76 we compromised and I picked him up in my car to take him to Sutton Hoo. The result of our

journey was an article which appeared in the *East Anglian Daily Times*, 8 September 1964, with a picture of Basil reading his diaries while sitting in the (then) open ship trench. The article also included a photograph of and commentary from Valerie Foulkes (now Fenwick), then research assistant at the British Museum.

Basil regretted that the discovery was not roofed over when war broke out in September 1939; he believed that the outlines of the ship 'could have been kept intact for a capital outlay of £1000'.

Time has moved on. Calke Wood including the clay quarry where Basil Brown made some of his best-known discoveries before 1939, has recently been sold. Sutton Hoo, thankfully, can never be sold. Opening in the spring as a National Trust property with good facilities and an educational programme involving the Sutton Hoo Society, its future as one Europe's most important archaeological sites is assured.

Don Black's home town was Stowmarket and he now lives in Mendlesham. His journalism included many years as shipping correspondent for daily newspapers based at Plymouth and Ipswich and, through the 1990s, in public relations with a port group at Felixstowe. He continues to write features for Lloyd's List.



Basil Brown in the ship trench at Sutton Hoo during his visit in 1964

(Photograph:

Courtesy Woodbridge Museum)

SOCIETY EVENTS: GUIDES' TRAINING

Visit to the British Museum

In July a number of the site guides took up the offer of a 'hands on' visit to the British Museum, led by Angela Care Evans. The aim was to have an opportunity to closely examine objects from the Sutton Hoo period, so increasing knowledge and understanding. Initially, we examined a carefully chosen set of Anglo-Saxon brooches and were introduced to a variety of forms, decoration and materials.

The second part of the experience took us all by surprise however. Some of the Sutton Hoo Mound 1 treasure had been taken out of the exhibition cabinets to be photographed for publication, so we were also able to examine the purse lid, the great gold buckle, one of the two pairs of shoulder clasps, and the gold and garnet mounts from the sword belt. This was a totally unexpected and almost surreal event; none of us could really believe we were

having such a close encounter with the objects that we have described to visitors so many times. There is no doubt that this whole experience has enabled us to bring new vitality to our talks.

Our thanks go to Angela Care Evans for her time and to the British Museum for allowing us to experience at first hand these exceptional objects from the collection.

Guides' Study Day

On 17 November, the second of our study days for guides was held at Sutton Hoo, by

kind permission of the National Trust. The morning was spent listening to lectures delivered by Jenny Glazebrook on the work of the Sutton Hoo Research Project, Angela Care Evans on the interpretation of the finds from the Sutton Hoo cemetery excavated in 2000, Sam Lucy of Durham University on Anglo-Saxon burial practice and Sutton Hoo, and Sam Newton on Sutton Hoo and what it tells us about Anglo-Saxon beliefs. The afternoon began with a plenary discussion with the speakers. Then Angus Wainwright outlined the new National Trust exhibition, followed by the opportunity to examine and handle a number of the replicas that have been made for the exhibition.



Above and left:

Guides get the unique opportunity to closely examine the finds from Mound 1 at the British Museum

Right: Angus Wainwright shows guides some of the ship-burial replicas to be used in the Trust's display (Photographs: Rosemary Hoppitt, Fred Bridges and Lindsay Lee)



SOCIETY REPORTS

Guiding

Foot and mouth disease led to three group tours being cancelled at the beginning of the year, but the restrictions were lifted in time for the public season to open at Easter as usual. 2,500 paying visitors (including people from at least ten overseas countries) came to Sutton Hoo up to the end of October. We had twenty-eight pre-booked groups, twelve of them school parties. Two groups, from

Bungay and Leiston came as part of summer schools to improve pupils' literacy. One of the groups built the whole fortnight around the Anglo-Saxons.

Along with the National Trust we have been recruiting more new guides ready for the increased number of visitors expected in 2002. This included some of our guides manning a Society stall over a glorious June weekend at the Suffolk History Fair at the Museum of East Anglian Life, Stowmarket.

Membership

We continue to get a steady stream of new members, which has resulted in a total of 383 members this year, up on last year when we had 374. Of those, 220 are ordinary members, 107 life members, and 10 student members. A number of members have opted for family membership, increasing the number of family members from 34 last year to 46 this year. We have 20 overseas members from 9 countries.

Following discussion in committee, we propose increasing the subscription for overseas members from 2003 in order to cover the actual costs; currently we lose a proportion in bank charges.

Left:

Pupils from the History Club, Eastbrook Comprehensive School, Dagenham, Essex, on their visit in July this year. They are pictured here with their leader, and Sutton Hoo Society member, Paul Mortimer. Paul is the owner of the replica helmet that is being worn here by fellow teacher Harriet Marshall. (Photograph: Paul Mortimer)





DIARY

Members' Preview Day

On **Saturday 12 January** there will be a special preview of the Sutton Hoo Visitor Centre and Exhibition for Society members. You should have received notice of this in November. If you have not received details and wish to come (entrance is by ticket only), then contact Jenny Cant (address below).

Sutton Hoo Society AGM

The **Annual General Meeting** will be held on **Friday 15 February 2001** in the Sixth Form Centre at Woodbridge School at **7.30pm**. (see location map)

Agenda

- Apologies
- Minutes of the last AGM
- Reports and Accounts
- Proposal to increase overseas subscription from January 2003
- Appointment of Independent Examiners
- Election of Committee

Please send committee nominations in advance to The Hon Secretary, Flat 2, Old Rectory Court, Melton, Woodbridge IP12 1NL.

The business meeting will be followed by a lecture by **Professor Martin Carver**, Director of the Sutton Hoo Research Project on **Bowls, Horses and Ships: burial rites at Sutton Hoo, and what they meant.**

Spring Lecture

The Spring Lecture will be held on **Wed. 24 April 2002** at **7.30pm** at St John's Hall, Woodbridge. **Angela Care Evans** will lecture on **Life and Death at Sutton Hoo - Interpreting the 2000 Excavation.**

2002 Season

14 March - 31 May: Wednesday - Sunday (and Easter Monday and May Bank Holiday)

1 June - 30 September: 7 days a week

October: Wednesday - Sunday

Open from 10am - 5pm

1 November - mid-March 2003: Saturdays and Sundays; Open from 10am - 4pm

Guided tours by the Sutton Hoo Society will be available on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays from mid-March to the end of October. We hope to be able to provide tours mid-week as well during the main summer season. It will be possible to have conducted tours at other times by arrangement; contact **01394 389700** to book.

Conference 2002

We shall be running our third Conference in **Autumn 2002**. In response to feedback from the previous conference the theme will be the Pagan/Christian interface. More details in **SAXON 36**.

Bawdsey Haven Yacht Club

Edwin Gifford will lecture on **Anglo-Saxon Ships from Sutton Hoo to King Alfred** on **16 February** at **7.30pm** at Bawdsey Manor, near Woodbridge. For details: **Tel. 01394 410258**.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Final Cut

Throughout the lifetime of the Research Project, and until the end of September 2001, Peter Berry has kept the burial site looking tidy with his trusty ride-on mower, donated originally by Ransomes of Ipswich and kept working by regular refits. It was while giving the site its final cut of 2001 that the mower expired in spectacular style by spontaneously

bursting into flame. Fortunately Peter escaped unharmed, the mower however has cut its last.



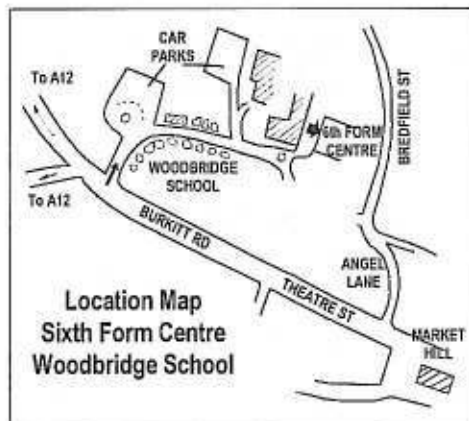
Peter Berry with the burnt-out mower (Photograph: Nigel Macbeth)

Demolition of the Exhibition Hut

Following our appeal we found a local home for the exhibition hut originally donated by the CEGB in 1989 (see **SAXON 9**). It was taken down in the first week of October to enable the completion of the footpath around the burial site.

Guides

The Sutton Hoo Society will continue to provide guided tours of the site. To join the growing band of volunteer guides contact **Stewart Salmond** (address below). You don't need to be an Anglo-Saxon expert - full training will be given. If you are interested in other forms of volunteering at Sutton Hoo then contact **Trevor Connick, National Trust, The Dairy House, Ickworth, Suffolk IP29 5QE** **Tel. 01284 736008** or email: **avotde@smtp.ntrust.org.uk**



Contact Addresses
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Email: chairman@suttonhoo.org Web site: <http://www.suttonhoo.org>

Sutton Hoo Research Project, Dept. of Archaeology, University of York, The King's Manor, York YO1 2EP

Saxon: Email: publications@suttonhoo.org

Who's Who - Sutton Hoo Society Committee Members

Chairman: Rosemary Hoppitt Hon. Secretary: Sue Banyard Hon. Treasurer: Peter Rooley Research Director: Martin Carver

Membership Secretary: Jenny Cant Guiding Secretary: Stewart Salmond Publicity: Lindsay Lee

Publications: Rosemary Hoppitt

Brenda Brown Nigel Maslin Trish Mulholland-Middleton Pearl Simper Robert Simper Angus Wainwright

CREDITS

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The Rise, Fall and Resuscitation of the Taplow Burial

Resumé of the lecture given to the Society, 28 October 2001

by Leslie Webster

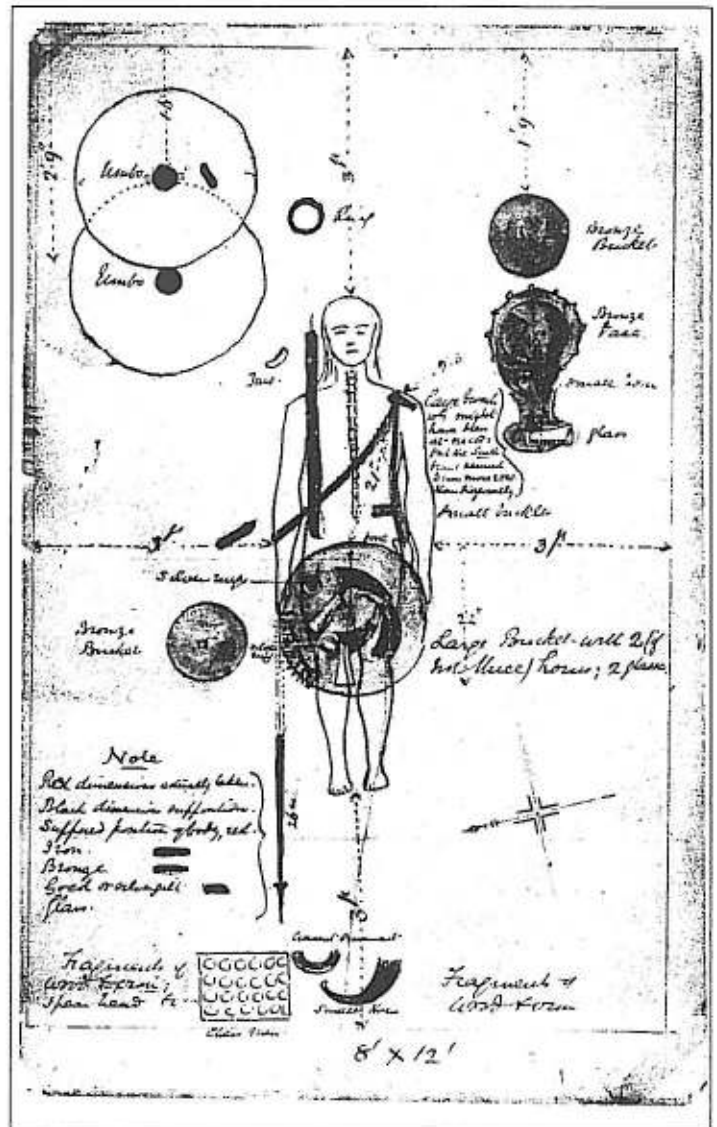
The story of the early 7th century burial in the old churchyard at Taplow, near Maidenhead in Buckinghamshire, is one of the most poignant and tantalising in the annals of Anglo-Saxon archaeology.

The huge mound which dominates the churchyard and surrounding landscape today, and gives its name (Taeppa's Barrow) to the adjacent village, like Sutton Hoo, must long have been a focus of legend and curiosity. But fatefully, there was no Basil Brown among the local antiquarians who tunnelled into it in the damp Autumn of 1883. They attacked the mound with a zeal only outmatched by their incompetence, bringing down tons of earth onto the exposed burial deposit, producing contradictory plans of the burial, and failing to keep any systematic record of their observations.

The result was catastrophic; although some of the key objects salvaged were restored for display at the British Museum, the shattered condition of the many remaining artefacts defeated the skills and resources of the late 19th century; and it was not until the skills learnt from analysing and conserving the Sutton Hoo Mound 1 material could be applied, that the many conservation and interpretative problems posed by the Taplow burial could be tackled.

What we can now unravel from patient sifting of the evidence is a fascinating story. The dead man was – unusually, and perhaps significantly – buried facing west, in a massive oak chamber, within which he was probably laid out on a bier covered with a featherbed. He wore a tunic trimmed with gold braid, and what may have been a cloak with leather straps fastened by gold sheeted clasps; at his waist was a massive gold and garnet inlaid buckle, and his sword lay at his right side. Laid around the body in the chamber was an extraordinarily lavish array of accompanying grave goods. Among these were vessels for feasting and drinking – over 19 in all – , at least three weapon sets, a lyre, gaming board and playing pieces, and many rich textiles. In scale, quantity and quality, much of the vessel assemblage matches the contents of the Sutton Hoo Mound 1 burial; admittedly there are no hanging bowls or imported silver, but the four glass claw beakers are certainly luxury items, as are the elaborate Coptic bowl and stand, the five or six silver-mounted drinking horns, and the silver and bronze mounted wooden cups. Also reminiscent of the Sutton Hoo burial are the large cauldron, tub and buckets, symbolic or actual containers for the meat, ale and other provisions for the feast.

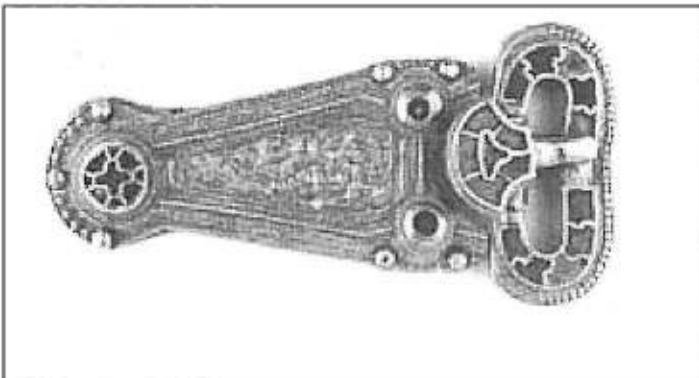
In all of this, we can sense the need to keep a fighting troop fed and entertained, graphic symbols of the communal joys of hall so vividly described in Beowulf and other Anglo-Saxon poetry; these grave-goods clearly signal the dead man's power and command over men. But they also carry another, intriguing message. Many of these



Watercolour illustration of the plan of the burial (Courtesy, British Museum)

objects, old and new, appear to be of Kentish origin, or would have been imported via Kent; very few of them relate to the local Thames Valley culture and they certainly surpass other Anglo-Saxon graves in the region by far in sheer wealth displayed.

This sense of political statement is lent further weight by the barrow's prominent setting on a dramatic natural boundary. High on a cliff overlooking the Thames, and deliberately set within the compass of a prehistoric hillfort, it commands a wide view westwards, seeming to send a message of ancestral defiance into the Wessex heartland, or at very least, to be a watchful guardian on the border of its territory. Hints from the documentary record suggest that the southern Chilterns at this time might have been a westerly outpost of Kentish domination at the height of the Kentish kings' power in the years around 600, before Mercia overwhelmed the region a few years later; so the barrow's occupant might perhaps have been a Kentish sub-king of a kind encountered elsewhere in the records. We shall never know 'Taeppa's' identity; but we can at least marvel at this expression of his might, and perhaps, glimpse some hint of the power struggles at work as the early Anglo-Saxon polities jostled for domination.



Gold and garnet buckle from the burial. (Courtesy, British Museum)