

SAXON

FREE to Sutton Hoo Society members/£2 to non-members

Edith in the Beginning: a new play by Karen Forbes



Edith Pretty (Kiara Hawker). Photo: Al Pulford

Over the August Bank Holiday weekend, (24th, 25th and 26th) Stuff of Dreams Theatre Company presented three outdoor performances of a new drama. The play focused on aspects of the life of Edith May Pretty (1883–1942) and was staged on the porch of Mrs Pretty's home, Tranmer House, overlooking the mound field.

2019 was the 80th anniversary of the discovery of the ship burial at Sutton Hoo and it was Edith's remarkable decision to commission Basil Brown to start digging on her land, with war looming, which led to one of the most significant discoveries ever made in Britain. It was fitting that the first performances of the new

play should be at the place where it all began.

The sun was setting beyond the River Deben as Basil Brown (Ivan Wilkinson), wheeled his bicycle along the path towards the house and the play commenced. The unique location provided an opportunity for the cast to refer directly to the burial site and the poignant ending featured three of the cast looking out beyond the darkness towards the mounds.



Basil Brown (Ivan Wilkinson). Photo: Al Pulford

The cast consisted of four actors, with Ivan Wilkinson playing other minor roles when required, as well as the main character of the meticulous Basil Brown. The play follows the progress of the excavation through numerous scenes, from initial discovery through to the inquest, focusing on the relationship between Edith and Basil, but particularly revealing aspects of Edith's life. Edith came from a very privileged background; she had been educated at Roedean School and was extremely well-travelled. During the First World War, she had



Frank Pretty (Joshua Gould). Photo: Al Pulford

been a volunteer at a Red Cross auxiliary hospital and had also served with the Red Cross over in France during 1917. Some scenes with Edith (Kiara Hawker) sitting quietly reading her late husband's wartime letters occasioned appearances, in flashback, of a uniformed Frank Pretty (Joshua Gould) composing those letters. The devoted Frank (1879-1934) first proposed to Edith on her eighteenth birthday, but they did not marry until 1926. Following their marriage, they bought the Sutton Hoo estate.



Rædwald's queen. Photo: Al Pulford

In the play, Rædwald's queen appears to Edith in a delightful dream sequence. There is an empathy between the two women as they drink sherry together; their husbands had been military leaders, involved in battles, and both women had faced the grief of widowhood. Dawn Brindle, as the queen, wore the out-of-the-case replica of one of the gold, garnet, and glass, *cloisonné* shoulder-clasps, to fasten her tippet. After their encounter, the queen departs, along the path towards the burial site, singing a

haunting folk ballad.

There was also one more performance of *Edith in the Beginning* on Saturday 9th November, at Sir John Mills Theatre. There may be more in the future.

The discoveries at Sutton Hoo have inspired other theatre performances, such as the Eastern Angles Theatre Company's *The Sutton*

Hoo Mob, written by Peppy Barlow. Also, a film, *The Dig*, based on John Preston's (2007) book, starring Carey Mulligan and Ralph Fiennes, is in production now. ❖

Edith in the Beginning, was supported by Arts Council England, Eastern Angles, The Garage, Norwich, Bury Theatre Royal, Colchester & Ipswich Museums and Suffolk County Council.

"I could kill for a horn of mead!". Rædwald's Queen (Dawn Brindle) and Edith Pretty (Kiara Hawker). Photo: Al Pulford



Basil Brown (Ivan Wilkinson) and Mrs Pretty (Kiara Hawker). Photo: Al Pulford

Formative Britain
a review by Nigel Maslin

Formative Britain, an archaeology of Britain, fifth to eleventh century AD, by Martin Carver, 735 pp, Routledge. 978-0-415-52475-9

I used to tell people on my tours of Saxon East Anglia who were new to the subject (accompanied by a warning of gross inaccuracy) that they could get a handle on the subject by thinking of the Early Saxon period as dating from say AD 450 to AD 650, (comprising the immigration and (re)conversion periods); then the Middle Saxon period (say AD 650 to AD 850, with its burgeoning economy and sometimes shifting villages); and a Late Saxon period with Viking and then Norman invasions.

With more accuracy and much greater complexity, Martin Carver's latest book similarly offers a threefold division of the chronology of the Saxon period, but also a wholly new perspective on Dark Age Britain as 'Formative Britain', or Fm1, Fm2 and Fm3, the term borrowed from Mesoamerican archaeology.

This is the first account of Saxon Britain based entirely on archaeology, on sites revealing artefacts, settlement, burial, sculpture and even texts. Gone is the reliance on corrupt medieval manuscripts and the need to translate from early modern nation-states. A map shows all the contemporary kingdoms, Hwicce, Elmet, Deira and the rest: Wessex and Mercia seem less prominent.

This is a big book, a textbook, but there are only seven chapters, all thematic, all with playful contemporary titles. The chapter about settlement and economies is called 'Working from Home' and the one concerning cemeteries as ritual places is entitled, 'Addressing eternity'. Notes are at the end of each chapter, sometimes more than 400 of them.

This is a book which considers the problem of archaeology generally and that of the archaeologist specifically. With such a 'kaleidoscopic' landscape [Martin's word] how can one ever say anything valid about the past?

Exactly. Even if you can draw conclusions and make generalisations, for whom were they ever meaningful? Formerly, this task has been left to the historian and we are more used to his or her inferences and artificial divisions.

Consider the third chapter (of roughly 250 pages) on settlement and economies. It begins with an introduction suggesting that in Fm 1, the north and west had fortified family homes, while in the south and east they were more open in the landscape. In Fm2, the west and north devised a type of settlement relating to the new monasteries, while in the south and east dispersed villages gave way to 'magnate farms' and *wics* (trading places). In the invasion times of Fm3, *burhs* (forts) and then towns arrived. Is this complex pattern even a pattern? As Martin acknowledges, remains are elusive, making a further challenge.

In many ways, this is a difficult book to read, not because it is particularly difficult conceptually or stylistically, but because the series of sites is essentially a series of summaries of archaeological reports, which are inherently indigestible. My advice would be to read the introductions and use the rest as a reference – and a very good reference it is too.

There is a further problem with this heavy book. After each introduction, we go on a 'field trip', which emphasises the random nature of what is available. We visit some familiar places. 'Settlements' includes Portmahomack (which Martin excavated), Yeavinger, Yarnton near Oxford, and York. It is this section which will probably be the most useful for reference. But the author rightly says that more evidence is needed to back up the generalisations, so we start again with additional sites, which this reader found rather confusing. So off we go again, first to the north and west, to Scottish glens, to Cumbria, Wales and Cornwall, then to the south and east, to West Stow, West Heslerton and Mucking. And that is only Formative 1.

Formative 2 has an interesting discussion about monasticism, which is archaeologically evident in the north, less so in the south and east. ('Did the English have monasteries?') In the north, the full panoply is obvious: enclosure,

watermill, evidence of ‘monastic arts’ (velum and precious metal production) and standing stone sculptures, but in the south, these are not usually traceable. Our friend, Gabor Thomas, has suggested that this is largely a problem of digging strategy, that our love of heritage has prevented the appropriate excavation of large monastic sites. Because our Society visited Lyminge (for the second time) in the late summer, we know what the footprint of an early Anglo-Saxon church looks like, and we know that the expected ‘monastic’ buildings of Ethelburga are proving elusive. Was this perhaps more like a ‘minster church’ than a monastery? In that case, we presumably have to change our understanding of eighth-century local ‘monasticism’, downplaying the efforts of Rædwald’s heirs like Sigebeht, *his* successor Anna and *protégés* such as Botolph at Icanho, Fursa at Cnobheresburg, and Felix at Dommoc. ❖

Lyminge revisited

The Sutton Hoo Society previously visited Lyminge, Kent, in August 2014 (SAXON issue no.59) when excavations were taking place on Tayne Field, a green, in the heart of the village. Dr Gabor Thomas of the University of Reading was, then, the excavation director of a programme of archaeology, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), to find evidence of the historically documented Kentish royal centre and the associated monastic community at Lyminge.

Noteworthy discoveries were the foundations of a sequence of imposing Anglo-Saxon halls. Evidence of these buildings, other rare, high-status artefacts and signs of associated activities indicate Lyminge’s development as an important royal power base from the fifth century AD onwards and brings Lyminge into sharp-focus in debates concerning the formation

of early kingdoms and the Christianisation of Anglo-Saxon England.

In April 2019 the Sutton Hoo Society received an application for funding towards undertaking the re-excavation of the remains of one of England’s early Anglo-Saxon stone churches in the churchyard of St Mary and St Ethelburga church, Lyminge. This was planned as part of a much larger community-based project called *Pathways to the Past: Exploring the legacy of Æthelburh*, which was being carried out by the church council. The early church with a nunnery is recorded as being founded at Lyminge by Æthelburh, a princess of Kent and Queen of Northumbria in the seventh century.



A plaque in the south wall of the present church of St Mary and St Ethelburga, Lyminge. Photo: C. Dane

On Saturday 17th August, after negotiating traffic queues and diversions because of the M20 closure, *sat-nav* directions along narrow single-track lanes and the obstacle course that is village parking, a coach-load of intrepid members of the Sutton Hoo Society eventually got to visit these most recent excavations. Dr Gabor Thomas, directing the

excavation, was there to greet us and take us on a tour of the excavations.

The present parish church of Lyminge, set on a natural promontory above the village and dedicated to St Mary and St Ethelburga [Æthelburh], dates from the late eleventh/early twelfth century. It is a fascinating old building, with many alterations and additions through the centuries. Partially underlying the standing church, and extending into the churchyard beyond the south wall, the foundations of an older, stone-built church were discovered in the 1850s by the rector at the time, Canon Robert C. Jenkins (1815-96), a noted antiquarian. This earlier, apsidal church was on the same alignment as the existing church. The remains were displayed until c.1930 when they were backfilled and covered pathways.

View of the apse from the eastern end. The foundation of the porticus wall, running from the external north wall of the apse and beneath the present church's south wall, is visible on the right, beyond the sandbags. Photo: C. Dane.



Canon Jenkins was not entirely accurate in his recording and he greatly misunderstood what he had found. For example, large amounts of concrete and Roman brick, in the remains of the structure and beneath the south wall of the standing church, were interpreted as evidence of a substantial Roman building beneath the church. There was no evidence of Roman period occupation from recent excavations in Lyminge. In the recent excavation, a distinctive pink mortar, deriving from crushed, recycled Roman brick, was found to have been used throughout the fabric of the early church and aided identification of disparate wall fragments.

Restricted by a 'densely filled churchyard'¹, Canon Jenkins was unable to excavate further southwards. The ground plans which he drew, envisaged the actual evidence of the early church to have been part of a grandiose basilica complex, extending southwards and westwards, far beyond the standing church of today.² However, a fragment of the west wall of the church, that was overlooked by Canon Jenkins, was discovered during the recent excavations, allowing its precise, and more modest, dimensions to be established.

The tomb of Queen Ethelburga was described in the 1090s when the final remains of the founding queen were removed to a new church in Canterbury. Evidence of a small annexe, or *porticus*, to the north side of the Anglo-Saxon church, fits the description and is also a characteristic feature of other churches from this early period. These side annexes were often mortuary chapels.

Two piers discovered during the excavation suggest that the chancel was separated from the nave by a distinctive triple arcade. This stylistic attribute is also recorded in three other churches of this date, all from Kent. Although the arcade of St Mary's, Reculver, was demolished in 1805, the columns, of imported Marquise stone, are now preserved in Canterbury Cathedral. A large stone fragment of what is likely to have been one of the supporting columns of the arcade from the Æthelburh church, found in the churchyard, has also proved to have been quarried from Marquise, north east

of Boulogne, France.

Further out in the churchyard, evidence for structures of mid-seventh century date has been found, linking up with earlier excavations to the south-west of the churchyard by Dr Thomas in 2008-10 and interpreted as the presence of the monastic community from at least the end of the seventh century and lasting through to the ninth century.

Together with the previous excavations, these most recent investigations provide a striking glimpse into the transformation of Anglo-Saxon society through the process of Christianisation and as to how the new religion was closely bound up with royal and political power. This supports the historical documentation that Lyminge had a dynamic part to play during the first phase of Christianisation in England.

Many thanks to the volunteers at the parish church of St Mary and St Ethelburga for their hospitality. Also, thank you to Dr Gabor Thomas for the fascinating tour of the excavations and to both Megan Milan and Sue Moss for arranging and supervising the trip. ❖

1. Robert C. Jenkins, 1874, The Basilica of Lymings Roman Saxon and Medieval, *Archaeologia Cantiana*, Volume 9: 205-223.

2. Robert C. Jenkins, 1876, Abstract of Proceedings 1874 - Remarks on the Early Christian Basilicas in Connection with the Recent Discoveries at Lyminge, *Archaeologia Cantiana*, Volume 10: ci-ciii.



The column fragment.
Photo: C. Dane



A view across the interior of the nave towards the apse. One of the pier foundations of the triple arcade is visible in the centre foreground (behind the gravestone). Photo: C. Dane

The Saxon ship-build at the Longshed

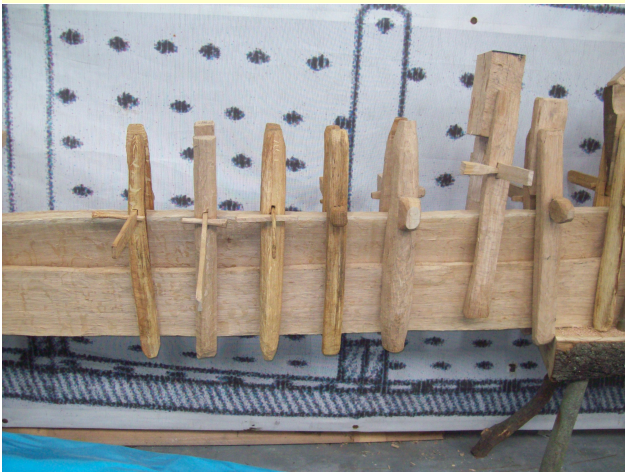
The Ship's Company has been making progress towards making the ship happen:



Making a 1/5th scale model to interpret the 1400-year-old plan and provide information for the main build. Photo: C. Dane



Making a frame to create a midship model of the hull. This will help establish the rowing positions and the length of the oars. Photo: C. Dane



Making clamps. Photo: C. Dane

Sponsor your own rivet at www.saxonship.org

Filming at Sutton Hoo in December



Sutton Hoo Society Guide, Pauline Moore, with television presenter Clive Anderson, filming a forthcoming BBC programme.



Sutton Hoo Society Guide, Jim Wyllie, filming with the Japanese Broadcasting Company at Sutton Hoo. Photo: S. Cant

**The Sword in Early Medieval
Northern Europe: Experience,
Identity, Representation**
A review by Caryl Dane

The Sword in Early Medieval Northern Europe: Experience, Identity, Representation by Sue Brunning. Hardback. 256 pages. Boydell Press (21 Jun. 2019). 978-1783274062. 15.9 x 1.9 x 23.5 cm

There has been very little written specifically about Anglo-Saxon swords since 1962, when Hilda R. Ellis Davidson's book, *The Sword in Anglo-Saxon England* was published. Then, last year, two came along at once. These were *The Sword in Anglo-Saxon England from the 5th to the 7th Century* by Paul Mortimer and Matt Bunker, and *The Sword in Early Medieval Northern Europe* by Sue Brunning. Many of our members may be aware of the former book if they know Paul Mortimer, who often portrays Rædwald at Sutton Hoo.

Mortimer and Bunker's book largely explores the pragmatic aspects of Anglo-Saxon swords, such as their manufacture and use, whereas Brunning's book ponders more deeply abstract concepts. Scholars have cursorily broached the subject of the social significance of the sword as part of other topics, but Brunning's book is a concentrated, broader articulation of the subject.

Drawing upon a wide range of multidisciplinary sources and ideas featuring the sword, Brunning examines its role in early medieval society, not just as an instrument of battle and bloodshed, but as a 'living' entity as perceived by the people who were familiar with it, even if they were not of the sword-wielding elite. The work essentially focuses upon Anglo-Saxon England, nonetheless, with a firm comparative observation of Scandinavian parallels.

Apart from an introduction and a postscript, the main text of the book consists of four chapters. Each of the first three chapters, with straightforward titles of *Image*, *Archaeology* and *Text*, focuses on different sources of material for insights into contemporary perceptions: depictions of swords,

the archaeology, and the concurrent literature about them.

All the images are black-and-white and there is an index and also a useful appendix listing the images and swords referenced in the text, providing the specifics of date, location and the key source of information about each. The footnotes almost take up as much of some pages as the main body of the text. Albeit, serving to preserve the flow of the main discourse.

The first chapter, *Images*, scrutinises how artists and craftsmen have variously represented swords in early medieval art. Here and throughout the whole discussion, there is a consideration of how an audience of the time may have perceived them, and the nature of that audience. With the Sutton Hoo *Plessbleche* helmet plates, which depict swords, cited as one of the examples, there is a seemingly more finely detailed execution of swords for those conversant with a warrior culture than for representations of swords for ecclesiastical contemplation. Curiously, there is a notion that an historic and even heroic prestige was conveyed by the tri-lobed pommel, which was frequently depicted, even when it was long out of fashion.

The second chapter, *Archaeology*, confirms that swords are rarely casual finds, that they have special significance. They are often presented in burials or deposited as part of ritual acts. From their sometimes worn and repaired state, many swords appear to have been in safe-keeping for several generations. Attempting to extract meaning from the individual components of swords in the archaeological record is most apposite here, since the unearthing of the Staffordshire Hoard in 2009, an extraordinary assemblage of metalwork that is dominated by bladeless sword-fittings.

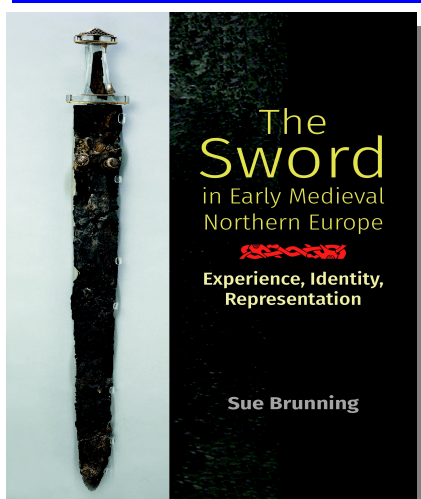
The third chapter, *Text*, again considers similar themes to those previously encountered but through many and varied textual sources. Of note, is that of all the multiplicity of texts available, it is vernacular poetry that is the foremost source of detailed references to swords.

The *'Living' Swords* chapter is a

discussion and overview of the inter-source parallels, presenting Brunning's principal strands of reasoning. Swords were viewed as much more than functional tools of battle. Perceptions about them were not confined to the warrior elite. Even to the *hoi-polloi* of Anglo-Saxon society, swords were often recognised as having individual agency, names, pedigrees and as participating in ritual, as well as battle. From the evidence that they were passed on down the generations, swords had a 'life' history, and could also be ritually 'killed'. Swords are revealed to have been regarded as dynamic 'living' objects

This examination propels the reader through countless, interesting ideas and theories leaving no doubt that swords had a multifaceted social and symbolic significance in early medieval Northern Europe. Despite tackling complex themes, the book is a compelling and easy read. Its exposition is comprehensible to the casual reader and scholar alike and is well-supported by innumerable examples. Its multidisciplinary approach offers the broadest scope possible for analysis. The depth of study opens a thought-provoking perspective on a much-neglected subject. A small but perfectly formed book. ❖

The Sword in Early Medieval Northern Europe: Experience, Identity, Representation



By Sue Brunning

A wide-ranging study of the significance of swords throughout the whole Anglo-Saxon period, offering valuable insights into the meaning of and attitude towards swords.

Swords were special in Anglo-Saxon England. Their names, deeds and pedigrees were enshrined in writing. Many were curated for generations, revealed by their worn and mended condition. Few ended their lives as casual discards, placed instead in graves, hoards and watercourses as part of ritualised acts. Contemporary sources leave no doubt that complex social meanings surrounded these weapons, transcending their use on the battlefield; but they have yet to transcend the traditional view that their primary social function was as status symbols. Even now, half a century after the first major study of Anglo-Saxon swords, their wider significance within their world has yet to be fully articulated.

This book sets out to meet the challenge. Eschewing modern value judgements, it focuses instead on contemporary perceptions - exploring how those who made, used and experienced swords really felt about them. It takes a multidisciplinary and holistic approach, bringing together insights from art, archaeology and literature. Comparison with Scandinavia adds further nuance, revealing what was (and was not) distinctive of Anglo-Saxon views of these weapons. Far from elite baubles, swords are revealed to have been dynamic "living" artefacts with their own identities, histories and places in social networks - ideas fuelled by their adaptability, durability and unique role in bloodshed.

Sue Brunning is Curator of Early Medieval European Insular Collections at The British Museum.

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Wuffing Education 2020 Spring Programme

18 Jan 2020: Sutton Hoo – the Other Barrows and Burials

Dr Sam Newton (Wuffing Education)

An assessment of what we can ascertain about the other barrows and burials at Sutton Hoo, which form the most immediate context for our understanding of the great ship-burial. Starting with the surrounding East Anglian landscape, we shall then focus in on Basil Brown's excavations at Sutton Hoo in 1938 and those of his successors, taking each barrow in turn. We shall complete the day with a look at the most recently discovered burials, those found beneath part of the National Trust Visitors' Centre.

25 Jan 2020: *The Closing and Reawakening of the Western Mind: Christianity in an age of transition, AD 250 – 750.*

Charles Freeman (Independent Scholar).

This day will focus on some of the themes raised in my book, *The Closing of the Western Mind: The Rise of Faith and the Fall of Reason*, first published in 2003, but we will take the story on beyond the fall of the Roman empire. We shall consider the role of the Church in the reopening the western mind, which forms part of the subject of my next book, *The Awakening, A History of the Western Mind, AD 500-1700* (due for publication, April 2020).

1 Feb 2020: *Trinovantes, Romans, and Eastern Saxons.*
Howard Brooks FSA (Colchester Archaeological Trust) & Dr Sam Newton (Wuffing Education.)

The period from late Roman Britain to the formation of the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms remains one of the most intractable in British archaeology. Here we shall review evidence from excavations in Colchester in particular and Essex in general, in an attempt to throw light on the late Roman town and its landscape. After lunch, we shall consider the origins and early history of the kingdom of the Eastern Saxons from the perspective of the Anglo-Saxons, with special attention to the Prittlewell burial.

8 Feb 2020: *Anglo-Saxon Kent: People, Archaeology, and History.*

Dr Susan Harrington FSA (University College London).

Focusing on the key excavated sites, primarily cemeteries and settlements, and related documentary sources for this important early Anglo-Saxon kingdom, we shall discuss the people, landscape, culture, and connections for the period AD 400-1066.

29 Feb 2020: *Rædwald the Great, First King of England.*

Dr Sam Newton (Wuffing Education).
It is often said that Æthelstan (ruled AD 925-939), grandson of Ælfred the Great, was the first king of

England. Yet it seems likely that Rædwald of East Anglia (died c. AD 625) ruled over a similarly wide area, for after his victory at the Battle of the River Idle in AD 617, he was the first overlord of both southern and northern Britain. His triumph by the River Idle also appears to have been the first time that a baptised English king gained victory on the field of battle. Rædwald may thus have been regarded as a very great king indeed, all of which strengthens the probability that he was the king who lay in state aboard the Sutton Hoo ship burial.

7 March 2020: *Elizabethan Music and Culture in East Anglia.*

Francis Knights (Fitzwilliam College Cambridge).

During the day we will look at the forms and style of music from the Elizabethan period through a variety of genres – ranging from the music of the streets and theatre to the music of the church, court and stately homes. In doing so we shall also focus on the music played in the homes of the cultured families of the Petres in Ingatestone, the Pastons of Norfolk and the Kytsons at Hengrave. Composers and their works will be illustrated by a lecture-recital of Elizabethan keyboard music.

14 March 2020: *New Revelations about the Anglo-Saxons in Suffolk: Recent Discoveries from Fieldwork.*

Jo Caruth (Cotswold Archaeology Suffolk Office).

Front-line archaeologist Jo Caruth will present some of the evidence from recent excavations and post-excavation researches in Suffolk and discuss how these can be used to develop our understanding of the social structure, daily life, and death in early Anglo-Saxon Suffolk.

21 March 2020: *Monasteries in the Landscape.*
Dr Richard Hoggett FSA, MCIFA (Heritage Consultant).

To mark the feast-day of St Benedict, one of the great pioneers of European monasticism, this study-day will consider examples from within East Anglia and from further afield to examine the development of monastic landscapes throughout the Anglo-Saxon and medieval periods. We will be looking in particular, at the emergence of the monastic cloister and precinct, the management of monastic estates and the effects of the Dissolution.

28 March 2020: *Church Dedications and Medieval Saints' Cults.*

Dr Janet Cooper (Independent Scholar).

Most of us are aware of church dedications, but what can we find out about them? Can they tell us anything about the history of the church? This day will look at the dedications of parish churches and other saints' cults observed within them, drawing particularly on evidence from Essex. ❖

2020 CALENDAR OF FORTHCOMING EVENTS

7th February 2020

A full day-trip to the Central Museum, Victoria Ave., Southend-on-Sea, Essex SS2 6EW, to see the Prittlewell Princely Burial Exhibition. Also, exclusive behind-the-scenes access to view a selection of artefacts that are not on display to the general public. *Details of ticket prices, coach arrival and departure times to follow.*

The online interactive chamber can be viewed at <https://www.prittlewellprincelyburial.org/>

Friday 21st February 2020.

The Sutton Hoo Society Annual General Meeting

Dr Susanne Hakenbeck, Senior Lecturer in Historical Archaeology, from the Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge, will be speaking about the archaeology of princely burials in a European context.

Snacks, tea and coffee will be available in the Café.

18th April 2020

The Basil Brown Memorial Lecture

At the Riverside Theatre, Woodbridge, IP12 1BH, at 11 am.

Dr Thomas J. T. Williams, historian, writer and former curator of early medieval coins at the British Museum, will be giving a presentation about Vikings. All welcome.

In Memory of Mrs Margaret Haines
The Sutton Hoo Society has received a donation from her family and friends.

A reminder: Some back-issues of SAXON are available as PDFs on our website

www.suttonhoo.org

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