

SAXON

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SUTTON HOO SOCIETY

No 4

SPRING 1986

FREE TO MEMBERS

PRESIDENT:	HRH The Duke of Edingburgh			
COMMITTEE MEMBERS:	CHAIRMAN	Malcolm Miles	FERRY LIAISON	Robert Simper
	HON. SECRETARY	Robert Beardsley	* * *	
	HON. TREASURER	John Aldridge		
	HON. MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY	Elizabeth Miles		Rosemary Hoppitt
	PUBLICATIONS	Mark Mitchels	DIRECTOR	Count de Lengham
	PUBLICITY	Mike Weaver	SITE MANAGEMENT	Martin Carver
				Peter Berry



AGM REPORT GETTING STRONGER BUT SOME PROBLEMS WON'T GO AWAY

The Annual General Meeting of the Society took place at Woodbridge School on Friday, 1st November 1985. Many Members were able to attend, but for the benefit of the rest of you, I will give a brief résumé of the points mentioned. What follows are my own notes on the meeting, and in no way do they rival the Minutes, which, of course, are the only proper record of the occasion.

Chairman's Report: Two full seasons of excavation have now been completed, and visitors are very much part of the scenery on the site. The first season saw 3000 of them, and we had no facilities whatsoever to cope

with their requirements. Remember the green Ford Cortina? Now the Society operates on site from a purpose-built hut, fitted out as a ticket office and souvenir shop by Mike Weaver and Peter Berry. The Portacabin Display Hut arrived at about the same time, and is a vast improvement on hand-held photographs (in driving rain!) When the ferry service began to deposit visitors on our shore we felt we were at last in the Tourist Business.

Hon. Secretary's Report: The 1985 Season produced a total of 4,000 visitors. After a slow start, not helped by the terrible weather, the TV programmes swept viewers up to the site in numbers we found hard to believe. By the end of season the Society had sold almost £5,000 worth of tickets and souvenirs through the tiny window of our Visitor Reception Area (shed.) Many more guides are needed if we are to continue to meet the expected rise in demand, especially from groups. Over 50 special visits took place last season, and many of these can be expected to return regularly.

Ferry Report: An anonymous donor presented us with a boat which was christened "SAXON" and thus the ferry service began. It only operated at weekends, and was soon frustrating landlubbers who knew nothing of tides, and expected it to run like a number 8 bus. Landing points also created problems, but Peter Berry worked hard (pun there) to keep the paying feet dry. The ferryman was not entirely happy with the arrangement, and often landed passengers on the Sutton side only to announce a return time which rendered a visit to the site quite impossible. The problems of

integrating Man with Nature have not yet arrived at a successful conclusion.

Site Manager's Report: Imagine cutting 10 acres of grass every two weeks . . . now add all the other tasks from building landing stages for the ferry to equipping "temporary" accommodation for the team of excavators. In between invent any number of gadgets required by modern archaeologists and you have the work of the Site Manager. Only one word of advice was offered: "Club biscuits seem to be the key to morale among the team." Peter concluded his report with these words: "It was hard work at times, but fully compensated by the immense interest, humour and fun. Most of all it was a real pleasure to be of service to such a grand bunch of people."

Membership Secretary: There are now almost 300 members, with much interest shown from abroad. During the year Members had a tour of the Sutton Hoo Room at the British Museum. An Open Day took place in September when archaeologists gave the Society a detailed tour of the site. This was a splendid occasion, and to stand beside a trench containing exciting shapes and shadows, while the expert explained what he/she was up to, and understood it all to mean, was exactly what Membership of the Society is all about.

Hon. Treasurer's Report: For the period ended September 30th 1985 the Society had a Balance of £3,777.77p in the bank. (By the time you read this, of course, the figures will have changed, but the impression of success and prosperity should endure.)

THE SUTTON HOO SOCIETY INTERVIEW

Mark Mitchels recently spoke to the veteran of site tours, Mike Weaver.



From: Brigadier Clive Robertson.



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

28th October, 1985

Dante

Thank you for your letter of 2nd October about the Sutton Hoo Society.

I am pleased to be able to say that The Duke of Edinburgh has agreed to become the Society's President. I have been asked to say that His Royal Highness has accepted the Presidency for one 6 year term from the date the Charity Commissioners accept it as a charity - as in the statutes.

*Your sincerely
Clive Robertson*

Any Other Business produced the Scoop of the evening. The Chairman announced that HRH The Duke of Edinburgh would honour us by accepting the position of President of the Sutton Hoo Society for a term of six years. This was received with great pleasure by the Members present. Our Chairman observed that fund raising should benefit enormously, and the Society must work hard to take advantage of our good fortune.

Elections took place, resulting in the Committee comprising the Officers given on the front page of this Newsletter.

After the meeting was over, two portable generators were presented to the Director Martin Carver, for use on site. It is not widely known that the cemetery of the Anglo-Saxon rulers of East Anglia is not on the Mains.

(Readers expecting an interview with Mike Weaver will be disappointed. I am removing my questions lest I appear as that most terrifying creature - "the alternative guide", stubbornly forcing a dialogue against all sense and reason.)

"One of the pleasures of being involved with Sutton Hoo is the contact with the general public who come as visitors. Last year we entertained almost exactly 4,000 paying guests, on approximately 200 guided tours.

Each guide has his "mode d'emploi." I gather my victims at the ticket hut, welcome them and we then step inside the gate for my opening remarks. From the grassy bank of the silage pit (!) I introduce them to the site with the aid of the small maps available, pointing out Mounds 1 to 4. A brief mention of the 1938 dig leads us to the 1939 story. A speculative re-enactment of the conversation between Mrs. Edith Pretty and Basil Brown in which Mound 1 was chosen for excavation that year, is our spur to move across to the Great Barrow. Commencing where Basil Brown began digging we walk up the barrow where the ship outline

and burial chamber are tastefully marked out in orange string.

Visitors enjoy a detailed account of where the items of treasure were found and volunteers are not hard to find to lie in the "body space." The "1939 story" represents 60% of my guided tour, I must admit. We continue with an account of the present excavations and move across to see the archaeologists at work. The tour concludes with a visit to the photographic display in the portacabin.

How do visitors respond? Of course, the story is SO interesting that it would indeed be difficult to fail to impress all but the most cynical of our customers. One of the problems faced by the guides is the disparity in ages and of background knowledge among the visiting groups. The greatest compliment I was paid last year was, following a 45 minute tour in which I had angled my remarks largely towards a group of keen-looking 11 year olds, a more senior visitor came up to say that he had enjoyed the tour immensely. "You're keen on archaeology, then?" I asked innocently. "Well, I've got to be. I'm Professor of Archaeology at - " and I won't embarrass him by naming the major university at which he teaches!

There are serious hazards in any guided tour, I must now add. The most serious is the totally undisciplined parent. He or she has NO control over a most unpleasant child who is allowed to run riot and destroy the visit for everyone else. Who was the parent last year

who watched benignly as his horrific youngster ripped up our marker string in full view of the party? Oh dear. Where is my erstwhile teacher's tolerance?

The alternative guide terrifies me the most! He or she will attempt to take over the tour - to address the visitors on his or her speciality. "Oh look at these broad-leaved grasses, everyone" was one classic cry. Soon half the party were on hands and knees, literally, following her taxonomic survey and I took the remainder off to complete the historical tour.

Weather is also an interesting tour hazard. It is remarkable how, from the heights of Sutton Hoo, one can see the weather coming - a squall building up over Woodbridge, for example. It is now possible to time quite accurately the arrival of rain from the moment it closes in on the sails of Buttrums Mill. I dress for rain if possible, and keep going with the tour. The less hardy visitors can dash for the trees or the display hut.

During my first tour of the 1986 season I foolishly ignored rain warnings and sure enough, on Mound 1, the pagan gods decided to punish me for my audacity - it poured. I kept going with true Welsh fortitude. Suddenly my audience began laughing, and the rain stopped - for me. One of the party had stepped forward with a huge umbrella and I continued to talk in the close and sheltered company of a delightful young lady! Makes it all worthwhile.

WINTER WORK

MAKING SENSE OF THE RECORDS

During the winter and spring months work on the post-excavation analysis of the finds and excavation records has continued in the Unit headquarters at Birmingham University. One of the priorities has been the cataloguing of every find recovered during previous excavations at Sutton Hoo. This usually involves weighing, measuring, and describing the particular attributes of every find. Once a paper record has been made, the information is entered onto a computer file. For the flint catalogue alone about 3,500 individual finds have been recorded.

Most of the finds are either flint or pottery and belong to the prehistoric period of occupation at the site, particularly the Neolithic and Bronze Ages. The flint finds, best illustrated by the range of arrowhead types have confirmed the multi-period, though not necessarily continuous, nature of activity. To ensure maximum recovery of information from our finds, we have been

consulting with leading specialists throughout the country.

The flint finds comprise the parent material or cores, from which many waste flakes were struck; only a few of these were subsequently modified by retouch into various implements. These include scrapers, arrowheads, knives, piercers and serrated flakes which represent part of the tool kit or equipment required for everyday use. A few implements retain a distinct high gloss polish along their cutting edges. The polish is the result of working or cutting organic matter. Future analysis of the flints will hopefully include a study of this polish to identify the organic material that was being worked. Indeed the lack of preservation of any organic material within the acid archaeological deposits, even from the much later Saxon graves, indicates the value of future research into this polish. One of the questions we have been asking is whether any of the flint was brought from outside the area, particularly from the higher quality flint resources available within the

SIT. VAC. FILLED

Mike Weaver is no longer the Hon. Sec. After several years of directing the presentation of the site to the public he is turning his considerable talents towards the organisation of Publicity for the Society. He will do well, I am sure.

As organiser of the Site Guides Mike is THE expert on tours, and his personal total is nothing short of legendary! The tourist aspects may grow in the years ahead, but the seeds were sown by Mike.



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NOTI

EXCAVAT

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1st August

A small team
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IMPORTANT NOTICE

Membership of the Sutton Hoo Society does not convey right of access to the site at any time to Members and their friends. It is most important that all visits should be cleared in advance via the Hon. Secretary: (Tel. Wdgc 3397). Good relations with the landowners form a vital part of all future plans for the site. No private visit, however 'harmless', must jeopardize this fact.

HELP!

The team of excavators desperately requires accommodation. The present strawberry farm site is far from ideal, and the greatly extended season next year makes it imperative a more permanent home is found. If you are able to help please phone Martin Carve at the site office:
Woodbridge 7673

NEW HON. SEC. AT THE CONTROLS

Squadron Leader Robert Beardsley has taken over from Mike Weaver as the Hon. Secretary of the Sutton Hoo Society. We wish him well in his new office, and note with approval his enthusiasm and efficiency.

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THE BOARD

ON DATES

Sham University
ology Unit
on Sutton Hoo
12th September

will be on site
July

FOR NEWS OF SUTTON HOO ...

Members are willing to give links to Groups and Societies. If you have a Society which would like such a programme secretary to arrange a booking. The Speaker may be of course.

A site tour is also recommended. The Society contact is the Hon. Secretary on 3397.

ANDBOOK

SUTTON HOO IS
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YEAR. IF YOU
ED BY THE AUTHOR
RANGED. CONTACT

FAREWELL

John Warburton, our Man i/c Publicity has relinquished office, giving as his excuse his departure for Mexico. Not very convincing!

John is not, as you may at first suppose, a football fan, but is leaving England to begin life afresh in Mexico in the company of his charming wife. We wish them both every happiness, and thank John for all his work as guide, Committee Member and Sutton Hoo enthusiast.

Bon voyage !

FERRYMAN WANTED

The Society would like to hear from a suitably qualified person interested in carrying out the duties of ferryman for the coming season.

To the right person this could be a perfect way of spending the summer, and the remuneration could be the final piece of good news!

Details from Bob Simper,
Shottisham 411273

YORVIK CENTRE

Any Society Members interested in a trip to York for the purpose of visiting the Viking Centre should contact the Membership Secretary soon. As yet there are no firm plans, but a good response should ensure a tour. The most likely month is October.
Tel. Liz Miles Eyke 460287

THE PLAY'S THE THING

The AGM saw the first performance of a dramatised reconstruction of the 1939 Treasure Trove Inquest. This play, by Mark Mitchels, has now been extended and is available, Price £1 from the souvenir hut.

A performance might make for a very agreeable evening for any historical society.

chalk regions to the west. During the later Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age (c.2000 b.c.) flint mines were being sunk at Grimes Graves in Norfolk specifically to acquire high quality flint for manufacture into implements. So far no flints from these chalk regions have been identified; instead the flint knappers were using the small locally available nodules which are spread over the sand and gravel capping at Sutton Hoo.

The study of the ceramic finds has only just begun but again the majority belong to the prehistoric period. Very few of the pot sherds are Saxon. Although these finds are very fragile and fragmentary, the decoration and type of pot indicate the nature of activity at Sutton Hoo was not purely domestic but probably included funerary and perhaps ritual activity associated with the burial of the dead.

During the winter a postgraduate student has been critically assessing the value of our site recording methods. During the excavation we described and drew every 'feature' - such as a grave, ditch or posthole - in as much detail as possible with a view to reconstructing their function and date. Particular attention was paid to the Saxon graves. A series of coded colour plans were drawn of each grave as it was gradually exposed in order to separate the body stain from any organic artefacts. It is obviously very important to know if we are recording in enough detail and whether improvements can be made. In connection with the graves, the Leverhulme Trust has funded a project to research into the organic decay products present in the burials. The researcher who took up his post this winter is also involved in assessing and improving all recording methods to establish a detailed research programme.

Finally a comparison of various geophysical survey methods was undertaken using the results obtained over the last 18 months to determine the best method and equipment available for future work at Sutton Hoo. The geophysical instruments are able to look beneath the intact turf and ploughsoil for archaeological features such as graves and ditches. The various geophysical methods were tried over an area in the field which was later excavated. Thus we were able to test the validity of the geophysical results against the actual archaeological yield. A paper on this work was delivered by Cathy Royle at a conference of the University of Bradford, and the contacts made there should result in the possibility of testing further equipment.

A.J. Copp
Supervisor and Research
Assistant

SUTTON HOO SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP ROUND-UP URGED

The Membership Secretary reports that there is still a healthy response to our plea for new members, but with some members failing to renew their subscriptions we cannot afford to become complacent. Any help members can give towards rustling up new members would be most welcome.

After the two television programmes last year there was a significant surge in the membership - and also visitors to the site. This confirms the fact that publicity does directly increase membership.

THE "PLOUGHMAN" THE "HANGED MAN" AND THE CULT OF WODEN

The work at Sutton Hoo from 1983 to 1985 had a practical, even mundane purpose: the location and evaluation of everything that remained underground, from which plans could be laid for the cost-effective excavation and survey which would lead to an explanation of this great monument. This work has been successful, and these plans have now been laid. They are to be published in detail in the Bulletin of the Sutton Hoo Research Committee No.4, which is due out shortly. But at the same time, the site evaluation has thrown up a number of historical discoveries which were not solicited; the existence of a large prehistoric settlement, for example, which now appears not as a mere coincidence but as a major centre for Suffolk and perhaps the reason that the Anglo-Saxon cemetery was founded there; and the curious group of graves, excavated in 1985 while we were looking for the limits of the cemetery. No two of the graves are exactly alike, and several gave indications that their occupants had met a dramatic and unnatural end. It all added to the sense of mystery which Sutton Hoo, with its great ship burial containing no body, already had in large measure. The resolution of this mystery must await the excavation of a large sample of the cemetery: that is our only security against promoting fantasies into facts. But some speculations are useful, even at this early stage and I thought that Saxon readers might like to share them.

When we dig a settlement site, we expect to find houses, and we tend to give, to the oddities that come with them, practical explanations. When we dig a cemetery we expect to find graves, and tend to give the oddities religious explanations. We are

conscious that there are exceptions to this - and sometimes we find them - but in general it seems reasonable that since religious belief is concerned primarily with what happens after death, a cemetery should produce evidence for religious practice - if not actually religious belief. But the whole subject is well known to be a quicksand which swallows up academic reputations. Scholars who descend to the underworld rarely send back coherent dispatches, and those that do, may produce work so intoxicating (like Robert Graves' The White Goddess) that practical archaeologists think it better to avoid them, like hallucinogenic mushrooms. The whole problem of studying early religion and its unfortunate effects on otherwise sensible modern people, is beautifully portrayed in Angus Wilson's Anglo-Saxon Attitudes, which is of course essential reading for anyone interested in Sutton Hoo.

Certain things we can say. On the west of the cemetery is a group of barrows, two of which contained ships, and two cremations in different containers. The barrow is an ancient and non-Christian form of memorial, used for at least 7,000 years throughout the western world, and especially in Britain. The ship-burial is a practice of late paganism in Scandinavia. Here are two clues, which we should not ignore, to the affiliations of the



Sutton Hoo community. On the east of the cemetery, and at its edge, is a group of 14 graves. Six of the bodies lay on their backs; two on their front; four had their wrists together, suggesting they were tied; two were kneeling; one had the back of his head missing; one had a dislocated neck ("the hanged man"); in one grave was an animal bone; and in the strangest of all, the body was buried in the hurdling position, with a broken wooden object, resembling a primitive ard ("the ploughman").

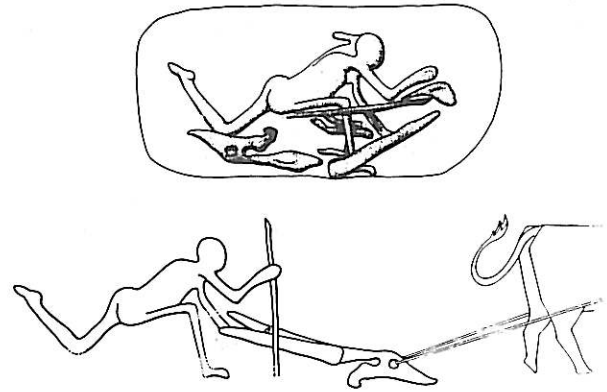
This is certainly a curious collection. It is not conventionally Christian (where the graves are generally east-west and the bodies laid out on their backs); nor is it conventionally pagan English (where the bodies are cremated and put in pots, or laid out in graves with brooches, spears etc.). It is a part of the cemetery where people were buried in a diverse, apparently haphazard manner, and some at least appear to have been executed. It is not possible to tell the difference between execution and sacrifice, since one is a version of the other. The most likely method of killing would appear to be either live burial, or hanging; although other methods such as stoning or stabbing would leave no diagnostic traces in these conditions.

We could now remember our links with Scandinavia, a country which was converted late to Christianity, allowing literate Christian tourists to observe some of the pagan practices at first hand. The evidence of the ancient authors was studied by H.M. Chadwick many years ago (The cult of Othin London 1899), who concluded that Odin had become a powerful deity in Sweden by the 6th C. A.D. His rites favoured human sacrifice, and the method was to hang the victim on a tree and stab him with a spear. Sacrifices were undertaken on the outbreak of war, and it was a normal fate for captured prisoners to be thus "sent to Odin". At Upsala in eastern Sweden, is a barrow cemetery (which provides the best known parallel to Sutton Hoo), and it was there that Adam of Bremen observed the sacrifice that took place to Odin every ninth year. On this occasion, sacrificial victims (including animals) were hung on trees in a grove adjacent to the barrow cemetery. Others have argued that sacrifice by hanging had a long ancestry in the north (going back at least to the bog-burials) and it is of course in the north that it long continued as the favoured method of execution. The description of the pagan sacrifice (with tree and spear) also implies how the Christian crucifixion was easily absorbed by the pagan Anglo-Saxon as a new religious symbol.

This is only to say that in the executed people at Sutton Hoo, we may be seeing the victims of similar rites as obtained later at

Upsala. In her excellent *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (Penguin, 1964), Hilda Ellis Davidson shows how Odin was probably a later version of the more widespread Woden, who doubtless demonstrated the same rites and inspired the same politics. Woden was not all unknown to the early English. The god gave us the name of a weekday (Wednesday) and it was from Woden that the Kings of East Anglia claimed descent. Woden, with his particularly belligerent and heroic attitude, may not have been the only influential god among the Sutton Hoo community. But we seem to have found signs of his worship. Whether true or not, the idea provides a stimulus for archaeological tests that might have otherwise gone by default - for example, disturbances in the natural ground caused by the former presence of large trees.

And what of "the ploughman"? Here we seem to be much farther away from any obvious analogy. But a few ideas may be drawn together, which may prove relevant one day. The 'plough' discovered is, if anything, an ard of a very primitive and indeed impractical kind. Even in light sandy soils it would need a stone or metal tip, rather than a blunt wooden 'beak'. If it is a plough, it is therefore more likely to fit into the context of a ritual rather than an agricultural implement. The artificial position of the body and the presence of a long staff (calling to mind the later English ploughman's rod, pole or perch) adds to the impression of a symbolic tableau. Unfortunately nothing like it is known, but there are some hints that ritual ploughing was used at some time by certain peoples. The Romans marked out the limits of cities, and of temple precincts, by ploughing a single



furrow, although they may not have used a specific plough for the purpose, or sacrificed it (and the ploughman) afterwards. Some prehistorians have also suggested that the patch of ground where a barrow was constructed was first "ritually ploughed", this explaining why, although barrows (including those at Sutton Hoo) are often found on ploughsoil, the ploughing is not always extensive beyond the barrows. If these ideas have any relevance, they seem to point, like the animal bone in another grave, to local British rather than Germanic practice. But this would present no difficulties at Sutton Hoo which is so clearly a mixture of peoples and beliefs. This indeed is what will make the Sutton Hoo community so human for us: they belonged to a time of political ambition and ethical confusion which will leave many diverse traces, often very confusing to us. If we can resolve even some of them, we shall understand more clearly the mentality of the people from whom East Anglia and England grew. But that is for the next stage in the adventure.

Martin Carver

