

SAXON

The Newsletter of the Sutton Hoo Society

Summer/Autumn 1988

No. 8

Free to Members

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Committee Members:

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Hon. Secretary Robert Beardsley
Hon. Treasurer John Aldridge
Hon. Membership Secretary Elizabeth Miles
Publicity Donald Brooks
Ferry Liaison Robert Simper

Director
Site Manager

Rosemary Hoppitt
Professor Martin Carver
Jenny Glazebrook

Sutton Hoo Members Open Day

Sunday, 25th September 1988 at 12 o'clock.
Members provided with a Ploughman's Lunch.

A.G.M. Sutton Hoo Society

Friday, 20th January 1989,
Woodbridge School at 7.30 pm.

Anglo Saxon Rowing Ship

One of the best ways of understanding the past is to try and re-live it. This can be given a scholarly title by calling it experimental archaeology, or it can just be an exciting thing to do. From the Sutton Hoo point of view one of the key questions is about the Ship in Mound One. Was it a craft capable of making a long sea voyage to Northern Europe? Was it solely propelled by oars or did it have sails? When we know how the boat performed then we are a long way towards unravelling where the Sutton Hoo people came from. No amount of theory or careful research can totally resolve the character of the Mound One ship. The only real way to find out is to build one.

The first and most famous instance of a ship from the early medieval period being reconstructed was in 1893 when a Norwegian, Magnus Andersen got together the resources to have a replica built of the Gokstad Ship, and sailing her across the Atlantic to New York. This craft was a replica of one found in a burial mound near Oslo fjord so there was no doubting her authenticity. This was meant to prove that the Vikings reached America before Columbus. Historians have since decided that the Vikings probably did not cross the Atlantic in a longship like the Gokstad ship, but in the more beamy merchant ships, the knarr. That may be, but Magnus Andersen's Atlantic crossing alerted everyone to the idea that it was possible to build accurate replicas of ships from the past.

Over the decades a few replicas of historic ships have been built all over the world. The best known must be Thor Heyerdahle's **Kon-Tiki** which, in 1947 crossed the Pacific even though it did not solve the Polynesian migration problem to everyone's satisfaction. The idea of an early medieval replica ship took a step forward in 1962 when a group of scouts in Denmark built themselves a Viking longship. Between 1962-84 fourteen Viking replicas have been built in Denmark, while others have been built in Norway and Sweden and in 1988 one was built in Dublin.

In Britain one was built in Shetland and another for the Isle of Man but there has been more interest in replicas of a later period such as the **Golden Hind** and the **Mayflower**. It is the Scandinavians who have re-learned the old skill of building and handling open ships of the Viking period.

The idea of building a replica of the Sutton Hoo Ship was first suggested in East Suffolk in 1982. A site was made available and craftsmen volunteered but not enough cash was found. It is probable that the amount needed was considerably over-estimated. It would be much cheaper to build a simple replica than a small modern yacht.

Some historians were approached, but they suggested that since nobody knew how Anglo-Saxon shipwrights worked, their skills and technology could not be re-created. This seems to me to be looking at the problem from the wrong angle. The purpose of building

a replica was to re-learn the lost skills. Gaining from the Scandinavian experience it would seem that even though a bad Viking ship replica can tell its builders something, one is not necessarily going to find out all the information from one ship.

Naturally all the Scandinavian replicas are modern versions of ships found in their own countries. No one has built an Anglo-Saxon ship replica. For the lack of a better term Mound One Sutton Hoo could be called an Anglo-Saxon rowing ship. Opinions are sharply divided on this vessel. Most land based Anglo-Saxon devotees throw up their hands in horror at such a ship actually gliding up the River Deben. For others it remains a dream which will be worth living out.

Robert Simper

Haugh and Woodbridge

To the Editor of SAXON, Dear Sir,

With regard to a Member's question in the spring issue of SAXON concerning Haugh Lane, this is a very ancient, deep, way into Woodbridge from the north and, in a 1522 Woodbridge will, was called the "highway under Bishoppes haugh". Tradition has it that a tumulus existed on or near the site of the present Queen's House. In 1873 workmen digging nearby uncovered, three feet down, the fragile skeleton of a man, lying east to west, with the remains of an iron spear head some 18 inches long as shown in the sketch made at the time. It was said to be 'Saxon'.

From Haugh Lane this old way led up hill and down dale across Woodbridge parish to one of the earliest river landing-places (now known as Kyson) below Kingston Hill where, traditionally, another tumulus once existed and the old way can still be traced by public footpaths. So it seems that the meaning of 'Haugh' hereabouts is a burial mound.

Concerning the name of WOODBRIDGE, in spite of your member's worrying about its derivation, I still believe in the old tradition that it was so called after a wooden bridge across the Fulbourne or Steynings Brook near the bottom of Drybridge Hill which was one of the main ways into Woodbridge from the west. This stream must have been more than just a bubbling brook and beside it they built a church, a priory (whose fishponds were fed from the stream) and a market place on the high ground above.

Yours faithfully
W.G. Arnott

Where is the bridge at Woodbridge?

I write in support of your correspondent's suggestion that the bridge at Woodbridge may have been a quay. The argument turns on what in Anglo-Saxon times would have been regarded as a bridge. There is the large town of Bruges in Belgium, whose name according to Prof. Dr. J.A. Van Houtte originated from Old Norse 'Bryggja', meaning landing stage. He, writing in Flemish, says that "'Brugge' was so called since boats came to the landing quay and a market was held there. In former times boats came all the way to Bruges. The river there is a mere stream and there is no question of a bridge (as we understand the term)." (1)

Robert Wace (circa 1100-1174) in his Roman de Brut writing of a harbour at Southampton filled with ships at anchorage, bound together by cables, says "There they thrust forth bridges to the land and charged the stores upon the ship". (2) In the O.E. poem Battle of Maldon, the term bridge is used to describe a causeway built of stone over the Ouse between the mainland and Northey Island. (3)

Ships coming up the tidal Deben estuary would have benefited from a landing stage enabling use to be made of deeper water and avoiding the Ouse. The likely site of the quay is surely at the end of Quay Street in the vicinity of Frank Knight's Boatyard.

Notes

- (1) De Geschiedenis Van Brugge. Lannoo Tielt Bussum 1982. Mrs. Y. Forsyth has provided the translation.
- (2) Wace & Layamon Arthurian Chronicles. Everyman's Library 1962 pp 79-80.
- (3) The earliest English Poems. Translated and Introduced by Michael Alexander. Penguin Books 2nd Ed. 1977 pp 115, lines 78 and 85.

D.E. Aldred

Sutton Hoo - A Gift of Arms

Through the generosity of a group of Anglo Saxon enthusiasts known as 'Living Time' the Society was presented with an impressive sword, shield and helmet on 19th June.

The 'Living Time' designer, Mr. David White, announced the presentation at the start of a tour of the site and Mr. David Pye, a Sutton Hoo Society site guide, surprised onlookers by bounding onto Mound 1 wearing the helmet and other period clothes and brandishing the sword and shield.

In addition to Mr. White the making of the items was carried out by armourer Mr. Nick Applegate and leatherworker Mr. Alec Milne. The helmet, sword and shield have been placed in the display room where visitors can pick up and wear the helmet and handle the sword and shield.



A gift of arms.

Sutton Hoo's Ancient Ancestor .

Beside the river Deben opposite Woodbridge are the remains of a large settlement 5,000 years old. Part of it now lies beneath ploughed fields and part beneath a much more famous successor, the Anglo-Saxon cemetery of Sutton Hoo. This summer the Sutton Hoo team are to map an extensive piece of the settlement and try to explain what it is doing there.

Sutton Hoo is best known for its vivid ship-burial, which probably commemorates a 7th century king of Anglo-Saxon East Anglia. The ship-burial lies in a large cemetery of earth mounds, most of which were probably built between 6-8th century AD. Last year a second mound was completely excavated and found to have contained a chamber grave with a small boat (5m long) for its roof. This summer, and next, three more mounds are to be opened as the Sutton Hoo campaign moves to its climax.

But England's most prestigious burial ground seems to have been placed on a gentle rise which had already been used by prehistoric people some two and a half thousand years earlier. Beneath the Saxon mound excavated last year, archaeologists have found the post sockets of wooden buildings, black charcoal hearths for cooking, and the ditches and fences of property-boundaries. Found with these are many fragments of coarsely made - but attractively ornamented - pottery, barbed-and-tanged arrowheads of flint, and thousands of flint waste flakes. It's a classic group of material from the "Beaker period" - a major political upheaval which occurred about 2,000 BC and involved virtually every country in Europe. The political mood of the Beaker period seems to have included the



Photo: N. MacBeth. Site Supervisor Andrew Copp working on the prehistoric settlement beneath Mound 2.

privatisation of land; and large sets of regular field boundaries, probably of this period, have also been found at Sutton Hoo. Most characteristic of the 'Beaker ideology' are the round earth mounds which the Saxons copied when **their** turn came to take part in a major political upheaval - the formation of the English kingdoms.

The work on site this summer will include the complete excavation of a large piece of the prehistoric settlement (an area about the size of a football pitch), and the complete excavation of a burial mound (Mound 5).

Martin Carver

20.06.88



Photo: N. MacBeth. The post sockets of a fence line of the 'Beaker' culture, about 2,000 B.C.

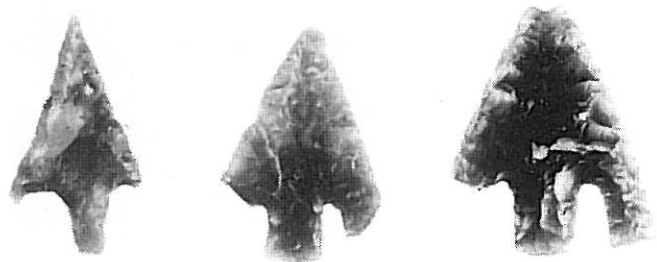


Photo: Norrie. Typical finds of the earlier Sutton Hoo flint arrowheads.

Officers and Executive Committee

The Chairman, Secretary and Membership Secretary have all given notice that they will not be standing for re-election at the next Annual General Meeting. In addition, the Executive Committee, which can consist of a maximum of 12 members, has vacancies to be filled.

It would be appreciated therefore, if any member feels in a position to offer his/her services that they contact a Committee Member on Open Day (September 25th) or by post to: **The Chairman, 7 Queens Head Lane, Woodbridge IP12 4ND** as soon as possible. The success of the Society depends on the enthusiasm of the Members!!

M.M. Miles

On - And Off - The 'Edda'

Almost as famous as Sutton Hoo among the great burials finds of the world is the **Oseberg ship** which was discovered in a mound of blue clay by Oslo fjord in 1904. The ship was beautifully preserved and contained a funeral cart, sledges, a double bed and rich tapestries and furnishings of queen, probably the notorious Ase, wife to two kings of Westfold.

In 1987, a group of Norwegian experts decided to make a replica of the Oseberg ship, and named it 'Edda'. It was a replica of the highest authenticity, with carefully selected oak plankings and lashed frame, horsehair sheets and hemp shrouds. The famous carvings along stem and stern, and the snake head and tail were exactly replicated. In May 1988, I was over in Norway filming with the BBC team under Ray Sutcliffe for our next Sutton Hoo programme, which is about North Sea ships and voyages in the Dark Ages. We attended the earliest trials of Edda, because we wanted to see some 'experimental archaeology' in action - and we were not disappointed.



Edda under oar

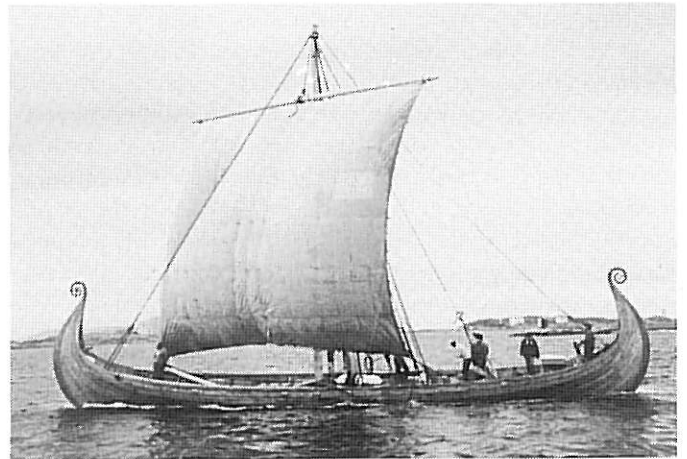
Edda began rowing trials in the morning and the yard was hoisted for sailing soon after 1.00 pm. At once we were aware of the power generated by the square sail and the speed which can be achieved by a clinker-built, lashed-frame vessel with no keel. Due to the flexibility of strakes and lashings we seemed to wriggle along the surface of the waves like the snake portrayed in the vessel's design. Although we had shipped water over the lee gunwale on several occasions while tacking, the capsizing of the vessel was sudden and unexpected. The vessel yawed and keeled over at speed ploughing the water on the lee side, jettisoning the crew into the water. I stayed dry for an instant by crawling along the port hull, but in thirty seconds the snake-head prow had slid under the surface and the whole ship with her. We were left in the glacial melt-waters of the Heroy fjord holding on to oars and deck-boards, until picked up by our escort vessel in five minutes or so.

Neither Ray Sutcliffe nor myself are accustomed to bathing in May at latitudes north of Shetland and I doubt whether the hardiest Viking could have lasted more than 10 minutes, let alone swim the nautical mile to the nearest shore. In the words of the BBC film script: 'experimental archaeology is archaeology at the sharp end - and things can sometimes go wrong; but it would take fifty years in the library to learn what I learnt in five minutes on - and off - the Edda'.

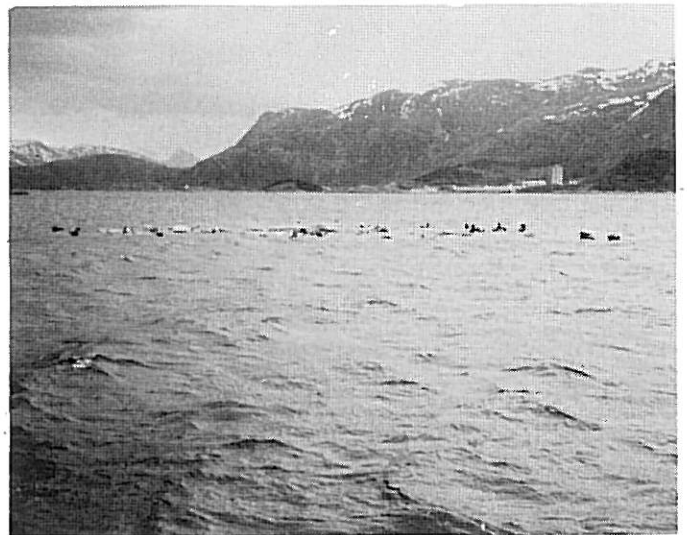
Martin Carver

Post Script: Edda has been salvaged and is now being refitted. It is hoped to undertake new trials and voyages in 1989, including a visit to Sutton Hoo.

Photographer: Don Lee (BBC film crew).



Edda under sail



Edda under water