



The Newsletter of the Sutton Hoo Society

# SAXON

President: HRH The Duke of Edinburgh

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## SUTTON HOO: LAST LOOK—NEW VISION by Martin Carver



The 1991 season at Sutton Hoo will be the last digging season — the last chance in our generation to solve the mystery of the great ship burial and shed new light on its inmate and his mourners. It only seems a moment since the team of scientists from the University of Birmingham first assembled at the bracken-covered rabbit-ridden site, cleared it, examined it, and began to map its invisible assets. And yet that moment was eight years ago; eight years in which many of our methods and concepts have become routine all over the digging world, and eight years in which the Anglo-Saxons of Suffolk have acquired new personalities and new roles in the story of England.

### QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS

Sutton Hoo occupies a very special place in that story, because of the richness, the art, and the strange ritual of the ship burial under Mound 1. The quality of the objects, their technical virtuosity, their mysterious design, their majesty, still speak to us directly — if in coded language. Was this memorial exceptional? Was it unique? Were the other mounds the burials of other kings, or of aristocrats? Were

*Martin Carver (centre left) visiting Sutton Hoo in 1983, accompanied by future members of the site team: Jenny Glazebrook, Jeremy Milln and Tuija Rankama.  
Martin Carver considers the condition of the monument as it was in 1983. Photos: SHRP*

women and children commemorated too? Was Sutton Hoo originally a folk cemetery containing all members of society? Had society itself changed between the 5th and 7th centuries? Was kingship ancient or novel for 7th century East Anglia? What and where was the original nation; was it East Anglia, or Suffolk, or the Sandlings? Did political changes happen as a result of decisions taken within the community, or as a result of foreign intervention?

These were some of the questions we set out to answer, through studies in the countries round the North Sea, in the fields of East Anglia, and at Sutton Hoo itself. Some can now be answered with confidence, others await the result of the final season, and others will need more work elsewhere: in Ipswich, at Brandon, at Burrow Hill, at Snape, at Iken — the handful of sites where the Dark Age people of Suffolk have so far been contacted.



Andrew Copp recording the remains of a Dark Age person at Sutton Hoo, Easter 1991.  
Photo: Nigel MacBeth

#### DIGGING FOR DARK AGE PEOPLE

Our first discovery was that Mound 2 had been every bit as rich as Mound 1, but with a ritual still stranger: the ship had been placed over a chamber grave containing rich accoutrements of another warrior king. This mound had however been thoroughly robbed — or excavated — probably in the 19th century. The wealth of Mound 1 therefore was unique only in that it had not been previously pilfered. The same is true of all the other mounds encountered so far — they seem to have been trenched (leaving that characteristic dent in the top) during a systematic 19th century campaign, and then rubbed almost flat by ploughing. But we could still read the burial rite: cremations wrapped in cloth and placed in a bronze bowl. Of these, Mound 5 gave us sight of a new ritual: young men hanged or beheaded and placed in graves around the mound, presumably as offerings at the time of the central burial. The Anglo-Saxons therefore practised human as well as animal sacrifice (there were horses in Mounds 3 and 4).

In 1988 the burial of a child, originally under a tiny mound, was discovered to the east of Mound 5; and in 1990 two more graves of possible adolescents accompanied by grave goods, were found in the south, making a row of children. So the Sutton Hoo community was one in which status could be inherited.



Students from York University waiting to begin work on the farm track to the east of the scheduled area, Easter 1991. Photo: Nigel MacBeth

#### PUBLISHING THE NEW VISION

While the excavation campaign has been in progress, studies of its wider context and meaning have advanced apace, thanks to our policy of publishing interim reports every year in the *Bulletin of the Sutton Hoo Research Committee*. These contain details of all the discoveries, Anglo-Saxon and prehistoric, that have been made. And there too one can read about the systematic mapping of the Deben Valley by John Newman, who has located 7th century settlements at Sutton, Wilford and elsewhere.

#### RESEARCH ON THE MOVE

At the same time, major publications drawing on the Sutton Hoo findings, have provided a series of stepping stones which lead to an ever clearer vision of early Anglo-Saxon England. In 1983, the last volume appeared in Rupert Bruce-Mitford's great study of the Mound 1 ship burial. For Bruce-Mitford, Sutton Hoo was a royal cemetery of the East Anglian kings, having strong links with Scandinavia (Bruce-Mitford 1975, 1978, 1983). Much of his interpretation has been endorsed or confirmed by the new project. The Sutton Hoo burial ground is dedicated only to aristocrats, and the links with Scandinavia are crucial. In 1986 the German scholar Wolfgang Böhme published a paper in which he showed that East Anglia was the first part of England to be settled in the early 5th century by Germanic immigrants (Böhme 1986). In 1984, John Hines revealed a further immigration, in the 6th century, this time from south western Norway into Humberside and East Anglia. And it is in south west Norway that a new project has begun at the ship burial site at Borre on the Oslo Fjord, under Bjorn Myhre who is applying many of our approaches to discover the origins of the Norwegian kingdoms.

In 1989, a most important book appeared, *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* edited by Steve Bassett. Its authors show how, all over England, small lordships were coalescing into kingdoms in the 6th century, the kingdoms of Northumbria, Mercia, Wessex, Lindsey, Kent and East Anglia (written by yours truly). New studies still in preparation are commenting on the political affiliations and ideology of these kingdoms, the conflict between paganism and

Christianity, the evolution of social structure and the use of the land. Many of these ideas, by authors from Scandinavia, Germany, France and Ireland as well as Britain, will appear in *Seventh Century Studies* to be published soon by Boydell and Brewer. The Sutton Hoo discoveries themselves are to be published by the Society of Antiquaries, an Anglo-Saxon volume going to press in 1993 and the prehistory in 1995.

The new vision created by the Sutton Hoo project is the work of many people, the work of a scientific team. It will change the way we think of our ancestors, and of England's beginnings, and it will be studied and developed by teachers and visitors over the next decades. Such scientific enterprise cannot succeed without public support, and we who have worked on the project — and the public themselves — owe a debt of gratitude to those who have unselfishly helped to put over its message: particularly Ray Sutcliffe and his team from the BBC, and of course the Sutton Hoo Society and above all its guides.

This year we will be trying to put in place the last pieces of the jigsaw, with excavation in the eastern part of the scheduled area. We shall also be looking to the future. The Sutton Hoo site itself is part of our publication strategy, and it will be our joint responsibility and our desire to leave the public with a monument we can all be proud of.

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## SOCIETY EVENTS



Catherine Hills

### SPRING LECTURE

About 30 members and guests gathered in St. John's Hall at Woodbridge to hear Dr Catherine Hills' lecture on Archaeology and Television. Dr Hills' television career began with the BBC series 'Blood of the British' which presented her with the opportunity to travel the length and breadth of Britain visiting numerous archaeological sites with which to illustrate her story of the survival of the British — in many cases visiting sites and archaeologists she knew well.

Filming 'Down to Earth' however presented a different challenge. No longer did she and her team have the luxury and control of an 'academic series' filmed in summer with editing in winter. Here the pace was faster and 'zappier', producing a magazine programme

which was on some days still being edited only a couple of hours before broadcasting. Sites and subjects were included because of their news-value, each item having only a few minutes airtime during which only one or two points were presented to the public.

The programme covered a wide range of topics and locations, and filming took place in Israel and Malta as well as England and Scotland. The subject matter was equally diverse, from considerations of the deterioration of Bronze-Age climate in Scotland, to cross-Channel trade and the Channel Tunnel.

There were problems — not least the fact that the choice of scheduling the programme in autumn meant that the digging season had more or less drawn to a close, and daylight was in short-supply for filming.

## SOCIETY REPORTS

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The briefest of business sessions included John le Mare and Mike Weaver being voted onto the Committee. We welcome John — who is taking over Publicity from Donald Brooks; and welcome back Mike — who as a founder member of the Society put in many hours of work in the early days of the Project.

### AGM LECTURE:

Prof Carver talked about his 'Thoughts in Progress' and began by considering the ways in which successful commercial peoples in the past had made use of 'demonstrative burials' to emphasise themselves as a powerful force — using large burial mounds as a signalling apparatus during times of political stress and aggressive activity.

When the Angles, Saxons and Jutes arrived in the 5th century they found Roman Britain in a state of decline. They established trading connections through 'beach markets' — coastal landing sites — whose security and success relied on the local 'peace-king' to allow trade to develop. It was to this world of signals, ideas and politics that Sutton Hoo belonged.

Martin went on to share his ideas on the relative sequence of the mounds at Sutton Hoo with Mound 5 as possibly the earliest of the group — a focus around which the other burials are satellites. The problem of the bizarre burials to the east of the mounds still has to be solved — and one of this year's objectives is to complete the excavation of the strip of land between the burials mounds and group of sand-bodies.

### DISCUSSION OF THE FUTURE OF THE SITE AND THE SOCIETY'S ROLE

Prof. Carver made the point that as this is the last season many more visitors will visit the site. The general public, as well as academics and archaeologists, both British and foreign will want to make the trek. The current Project will have set the agenda for the next 50 years in Anglo-Saxon investigation in England.

As to the future of the site, ideas have 'spiralled and veered from one extreme to another'. From the 'rural idyll' to be appreciated in solitude, to elaborate reconstructions — a combination of 'high theatre' and 'weedy slag-heaps'. In between lay the compromise and consensus view of returning the site to its 1983 status, but managed and cared for, with information boards and unobtrusive signs for the benefit of visitors.

Discussion and questions followed. Robert Simper suggested that without the excavations and display there may be few visitors to the site in the future. However it was pointed out that next year's final TV programme and subsequent publications would probably boost numbers for the first few years. Mike Weaver agreed with this, noting that before 1983 there was public interest in the site and good site tours were done without the 'props'. Mac Miles felt that the Society could broaden its role — perhaps funding a scholarship to encourage Anglo-Saxon studies throughout Suffolk. Other questions considered the practicalities of running the site and visits — car-parking, wardens and access in general.

Much of this would be covered by the Management Agreement, under negotiation with Suffolk County Council and English Heritage. Responsibility for the site may ultimately lie with the Heritage Coast scheme. In summing up Robert Simper said that the Society was in general agreement with the ideas presented by Prof Carver, and that a review of the Society's role would be appropriate in 5 years time when the impact of a display centre off-site (in the Tide Mill Granary) could be assessed.

### GUIDES' CHRISTMAS GET-TOGETHER

Once again those stalwart members of the Society — the Site Guides — who brave all conditions, the heat, the cold, the wind and rain to show visitors round the site, gathered just before Christmas for a social evening of seasonal food, drink and good company. Robert Simper was able to thank them for their untiring efforts over a busy year of guiding. Our thanks go to the Hoppitts for their hospitality and to the Committee members for providing the food and drink.



Martin Carver and colleagues from BUFAU size up the Granary in 1983. Would it really be possible to fit a full-size replica of the Mound 1 ship inside? Photo: SHRP.

Inset: Aerial view of the Tide Mill, and Granary before renovation. Photo: Cliff Hoppitt

# THE BOSS HALL ANGLO-SAXON CEMETERY, IPSWICH

by John Newman



*Inset: Work underway on the Boss Hall cemetery site in May of last year. Photo: Suffolk C.C.*

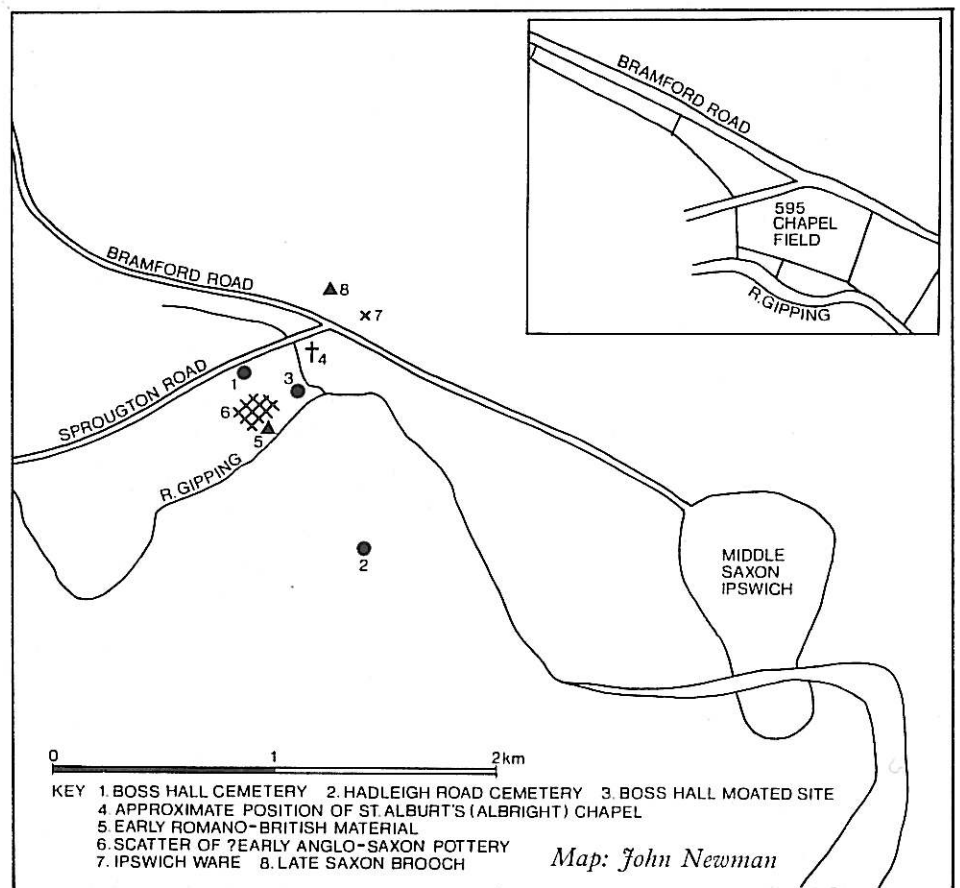


*The soil block from the wealthy female grave at Boss Hall during "excavation" in the Metals Conservation Laboratory at the British Museum. The silver cosmetic set with its' series of wire rings, various beads and the back of the composite brooch can be clearly seen. Photo: The British Museum*

The discovery of a new Anglo-Saxon cemetery is always an exciting event and when one of the burials is found to contain particularly wealthy grave goods then both public and academic interest is instantly aroused. This has proved to be true of the cemetery which was discovered on the Boss Hall Industrial Estate in May last year but which could only be made public in November as some of the finds needed expert attention after they were lifted from the ground. Premature publicity would have been unhelpful and self-defeating as the most important finds had to be lifted from one of the graves in a soil block which was then taken to the British Museum, and this complex was not fully disentangled until the autumn of last year.

The Anglo-Saxon cemetery lies in between the River Gipping and Sproughton Road on the western side of Ipswich and it was discovered during a routine visit to a building site on the Industrial Estate. Such visits to building sites are frequently made by archaeologists in order to inspect ground disturbances, such as construction trenches, for evidence of past activity. In this case, four small scatters of handmade pottery sherds were found and the close association of fragments of burnt bone made it clear that the site machinery had disturbed four cremation urns. The bases of two of these cremation urns were located in situ and quickly lifted.

After this discovery further earth-moving operations were kept under close observation

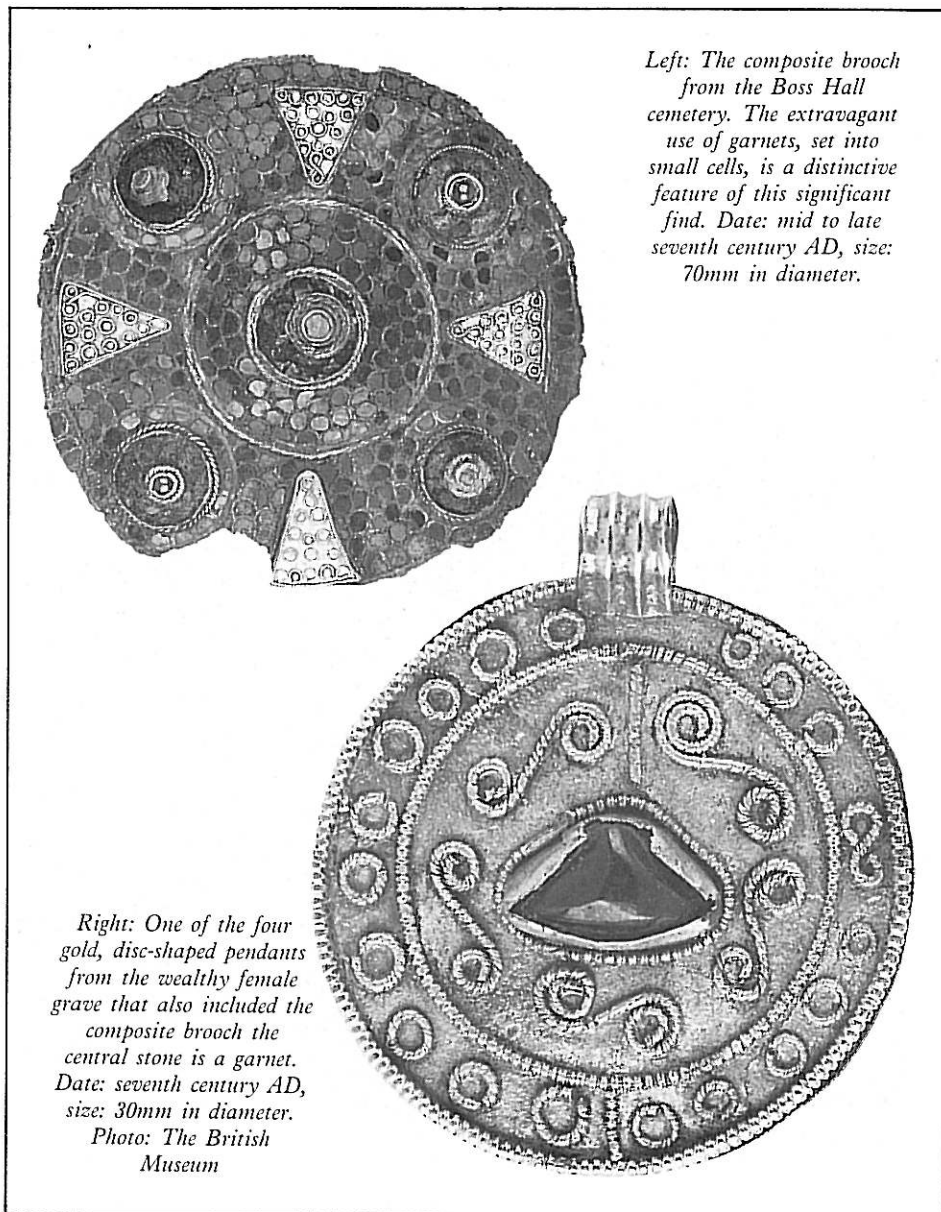


and a week later the distinctive outlines of inhumation graves could be clearly seen. The fragmentary cremation urns had already been identified as being of Early Anglo-Saxon date and it rapidly became obvious that these graves must be of the same date. Fortunately the Archaeological Unit, which is part of the County Council's Planning Department, was working on a site in the centre of Ipswich at this time and it was possible, therefore, to rapidly redeploy the excavation team in order to cope with this unexpected discovery.

Three days of extremely hectic work then began and full credit must go to the team for the high quality of excavation and recording that was achieved under such conditions. The co-operation of the site owners, Ipswich Co-operative Society Ltd, should also be noted as they allowed full access for this work to take place. The final credit must go to the contractors, Haymills Ltd, who, through their site agent Mark Scopes and his team, co-operated in every way possible. This assistance helped in no small way to ensure that the rapid excavation achieved its aim of salvaging what can be seen as a very important piece of Anglo-Saxon archaeology. During these three days 19 graves were excavated and a little later, 3 more graves and another cremation urn were found in pipe and cable trenches near the main site.

Due to the extremely acidic nature of the sand and gravel no skeletons survived in any of the graves and only in a few cases were the stains, or pale silhouettes, of some arm and leg bones noted. Deciding which graves might be male or female depends, therefore, totally on grave goods. Using this evidence we can be sure that the 7 graves with iron spearheads and shield bosses are male and the 9 graves with bronze brooches and glass and amber beads are female. However, 3 burials had no grave goods at all and 3 more only had simple objects, such as knives, which give no clue as to whether they were interred with a man or woman. None of the graves produced any evidence for the use of wooden coffins or biers in the burial rite. However, one of the male graves was found to be in a large chamber which had evidence for wooden planking around the edges. This chamber grave was the richest of the male burials, containing a shield boss and 3 spearheads as well as various smaller, personal objects. The way in which 4 of the cremation urns were placed in an arc around this grave is also of interest as they indicate the presence of a small mound or barrow over the chamber. Evidence for the construction of small barrows is becoming increasingly common in Early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in East Anglia and we may be able to see in this site an echo of the tradition that was eventually to give rise to the great royal and aristocratic mounds at Sutton Hoo. The trouble taken in constructing these chamber graves and accompanying mounds possibly indicates the prestige and social position that the people thus interred held in life.

All of the graves, save one, excavated at Boss Hall so far fall into a standard, regional Early Anglo-Saxon type of the sixth and early seventh centuries. However, as already inferred above, one of the graves proved to be exceptionally wealthy. During the excavation it was obvious that this grave contained an extremely complex group of objects and these were lifted in a small block of soil. The true significance of this group only became apparent gradually as Fleur Shearman, in the Metals Conservation Laboratory at the British Museum, skilfully



*Left: The composite brooch from the Boss Hall cemetery. The extravagant use of garnets, set into small cells, is a distinctive feature of this significant find. Date: mid to late seventh century AD, size: 70mm in diameter.*

*Right: One of the four gold, disc-shaped pendants from the wealthy female grave that also included the composite brooch the central stone is a garnet. Date: seventh century AD, size: 30mm in diameter. Photo: The British Museum*

disentangled a complex of gold, silver and bronze objects. This group had been put in a linen bag with the woman buried in this grave and consisted of a composite brooch set with numerous small garnets, 4 gold disc-shaped pendants, a silver cosmetic set, 2 coins and various other smaller pendants and beads. The coins in this group give the best clue as to the date of deposition and are a gold solidus of the Merovingian King Sigebert III (634-656 AD), which had been used as a pendant, and a primary silver sceatta. The sceatta is one of the series of early English "pennies" and dates to around C700 AD. The latter coin therefore gives us a date at the end of the seventh century or early in the eighth century for the grave and this helps to explain the apparent secrecy in which such a rich group of objects were interred in a bag instead of being on show. By the late seventh century East Anglia was a Christian kingdom. Pagan rites therefore, such as the interring of grave goods with bodies, must either have been carried out secretly or it is possible that such practices were tolerated if carried out in a discrete manner.

Whichever is the case, this grave group should prove to be one of the most stimulating and exciting finds to come out of Anglo-Saxon East Anglia for some time. As noted above, both public and academic interest will be aroused and, undoubtedly, much ink will be spilt arguing the significance of these finds. The importance of

the Boss Hall area is now apparent and initial documentary research has reinforced this interest. The Boss Hall area was, until relatively recently, an outlying part of Bramford parish and it contained, until the sixteenth century, a chapel dedicated to St Albright. The importance of these facts are that Bramford contained one of the major royal Anglo-Saxon manors in Suffolk and Albright is probably a corruption of Aethelbeorht, the King of East Anglia who died in 794 AD. The area of the Boss Hall cemetery therefore has direct links with land that probably belonged to the East Anglian royal family with a chapel, or church, dedicated to an East Anglian king nearby. With this pedigree it may not be so surprising that wealthy burials are to be found here. Perhaps we have a cemetery containing members of the local Anglo-Saxon aristocracy and therefore a truly complementary area of study and research to Sutton Hoo.

John Newman works for Suffolk Archaeological Unit, based in the County Council's Planning Department. He conducted the Regional Survey in conjunction with the Sutton Hoo Project from 1983-6, and has been in charge of a number of sites excavated by the Unit. He supervised the work at Boss Hall during May and June last year.

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# NEW LIGHT ON ANGLO-SAXON SUFFOLK

by Valerie Fenwick

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It has been said that bone does not survive in Sandlings soil, but excavations have shown that this is not always the case. The 45-acre site of Burrow Hill, Butley, is an outlier of Red Crag topped with glacial gravel. It was an island before the marshes were reclaimed in the medieval period. For over a century the gravel has been quarried to metal local roads and in the process hundreds of graves have been destroyed together with the heart of an important Anglo-Saxon settlement on its summit.

The Butley Excavation Group (its acronym, BEG, no accident since it is without funding) has been working ahead of the intermittent gravel extraction since 1978. The Group has discovered skeletons in all states of preservation, from nothing more than a sandy outline ("sand bodies"), to paper-thin bone, to partial, and in one case perfect, preservation.

In the settlement area it was the same story; the condition of the bones from food varied, depending on the extent to which they had been protected by the thousands of discarded oyster shells and by waste products from the smithies.

Coins found in the settlement date this occupation to between the end of the 7th century and the middle of the 9th century. Many of the coins had been swept up accidentally with the household rubbish and thrown into neatly dug ditches, together with broken pottery, glass and small metal objects. Latrines had been constructed over these ditches and tiny bones, burnt cereal grains and casts of fruit stones were



*Commanding the confluence of the Ore and Butley rivers, the strategic position of Burrow Hill can be appreciated from the air. Photo: C. Hoppitt  
As at Sutton Hoo the light sandy soil makes the detection of features very difficult and conventional excavation techniques have to be modified. Photo: author*

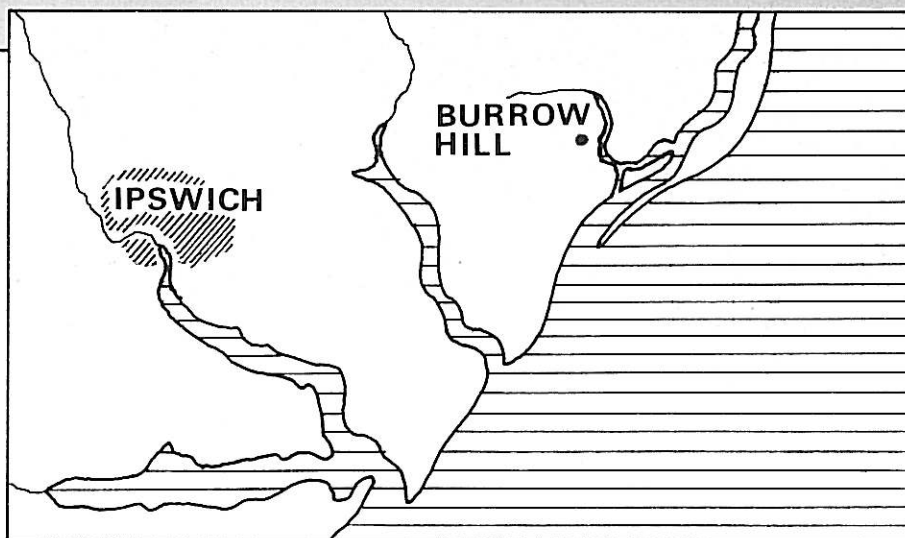


preserved in the cess. These finds together with the animal, bird and fish bones and the molluscs are being studied and will provide much-needed information on many aspects of Anglo-Saxon farming and diet in the Sandlings.

Little evidence of the buildings survives, but post-holes and trenches show that they were of wood, and fragments of burnt daub that they had neatly-finished walls of wattle coated with this material. Window glass and wall tiles together with locks and keys show that the standard of living was much higher than at West Stow, near Bury St. Edmunds. This is also borne out by imported luxuries, such as Islamic glass and glossy black and red tableware from the Continent.

However, they were certainly capable of making for themselves most of the items they needed. For instance they not only forged nails and tools, but processed local ore in small shaft furnaces. The discovery of a kiln made of courses of coralline crag set in marsh clay, together with the wall-tiles, and forms of pottery not found in Ipswich confirmed what had been long suspected — namely, that not all 'Ipswich Ware' was necessarily made in the town.

Walking from Butley High Corner along the causeway to the former island, it is hard to imagine the former activity on the summit. Instead of the cry of skylarks there was then the clanging of hammer on anvil and the smoke of kiln and furnace. Lead was being cast, cloth woven and antler carved. Whalebone was utilised to make small plaques, or perhaps little writing tablets, just like the one found years ago at Blythburgh up the coast. Fishing was an important activity, to judge by the oyster middens. Lead weights and fish-hooks have been found, also the iron fastenings which held together the overlapping planks of their craft.



*A cooking jar with food remains and stains, a pottery version of the iron lamp in the Sutton Hoo ship and small tweezers, pins and dress fittings. Photo: author*

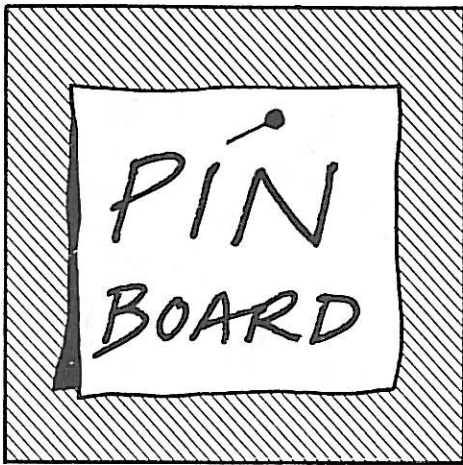
These were no doubt drawn up on the gently sloping foot of the Hill near the modern hard.

Human activity apart, perhaps the most pervasive sound to have been heard 1300 years ago was the bleating of sheep and the tinkle of the bell-wether. The long-haired fleeces would have been carefully plucked, and the iron teeth from wool combs have been found at the site. To judge from the sheen on the fine diamond-patterned worsted from Sutton Hoo, the spinner's skill was astonishing. Quality textiles were being produced a century and more later on Burrow Hill. The tools of production, but not the fabrics themselves, have survived. The lightest loom-weights recorded in northern Europe would have been used to weave ultra-fine linen — and possibly nettle — from which a delicate gauze could be made. Iron pins as small as those used by needlewomen today,

together with needles and a tiny bobbin have also been found.

This Easter some of the finds were put on public display for the first time in Woodbridge Museum, where they complement the discoveries made in the recent excavation at Sutton Hoo.

Valerie Fenwick's connections with Sutton Hoo go back to 1964 when she became Assistant Director of the Sutton Hoo ship-burial re-excavation. She is currently involved in the creation of the proper framework for the research and protection of the UK nautical heritage as a member of the Joint Nautical Archaeology Policy Committee, and is Chairman of the CBA Committee on Nautical Archaeology.



## DIARY

### EXCAVATION SEASON

The final excavation season of the current project will run from 7 July to 4 October 1991. The work will be completed by a team of 30-40 archaeologists, students and volunteers, and two training courses have been arranged.

### SUTTON HOO: OPENING TIMES

There will be guided tours of the site on weekend afternoons at 2.00 and 3.00pm, from Easter to late September. This may well be the last chance in our lifetime to see excavation in

progress at Sutton Hoo. Don't forget, Society members can join the tours free of charge (just show your membership card).

### SUTTON HOO SOCIETY MEMBERS OPEN DAY

Society members will be invited to review the results of research and see the closing stages of excavation at Sutton Hoo on **Sunday 15 September 1991**. The day begins at 11.30am with a tour by Professor Martin Carver, and a ploughman's lunch will be served at 1.00pm. The usual warnings about the weather apply — Sutton Hoo is fairly exposed, so please come prepared with warm clothing, waterproofs and sensible shoes (unless the temperature is soaring).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Society and the project team would like to thank Rushmere St. Andrew Village Hall Management Committee for their donation of 20 wooden chairs. These will provide seating in the display area for slide lectures, and somewhere for weary visitors to rest.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dr Stanley West retired from the post of County Archaeologist at the end of January, and Keith Wade has been appointed as his successor. Our warmest congratulations go to

Keith, and best wishes to Stanley West for an enjoyable retirement.



*Dr Stanley West (left) and Keith Wade (right).  
Photo: Nigel MacBeth*

**OVERSEAS MEMBERS:** Due to the high cost of processing cheques drawn on foreign banks, we would like to remind overseas members to pay their subscriptions by international money order. This will of course ensure that your contributions are of maximum benefit to the Society.

**YOUR LETTERS . . .** we want to know your views on **Saxon**, the Society and the research project; and we are especially keen to receive your ideas and suggestions for future articles. Letters should be addressed to the Editor, Sutton Hoo Society (address below).



*Winter at Sutton Hoo . . . very cold weather and the first fall of snow in February this year. Photo: Nigel MacBeth*

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