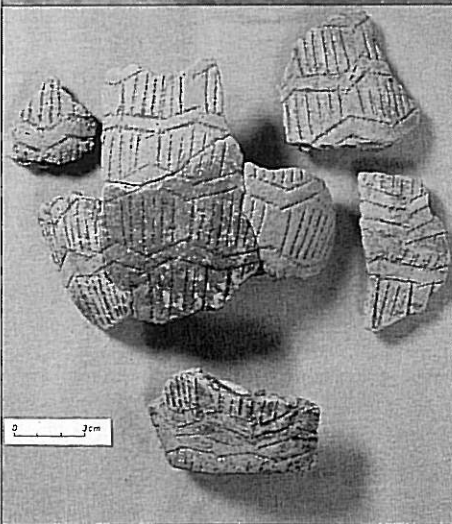




SAXON

No 18/1993

SUTTON HOO'S REMOTE PAST by Madeleine Hummler



Above: Excavation of the Beaker pits by students from York University, Spring 1992 (Photo: Nigel Macbeth).

Left: Beaker pottery from the pit complex (Photo: John Bateman).

Right: Katie Lister excavating a pit containing near-complete Neolithic pottery (Photo: Nigel Macbeth).

Saxon's issues have concentrated, for the most part, upon the 7thC AD Anglo-Saxon burial ground; it is after all what the site is famous for, and what the research campaign of 1983-1992 was destined to document, dissect and understand; a task successfully completed and now entering its analytical and synthetic phases at the University of York. However there is more to Sutton Hoo: its prehistoric past.

Visitors to the site may be aware that the Anglo-Saxon cemetery is superimposed on a more ancient landscape, less spectacular, less evocative, but nevertheless giving distinct signals from the remote past. It is these distant signals that the present despatch attempts to interpret; translating pits, hollows, postholes,

gullies and ditches long lost in the sand into the framework of a sequence. The Anglo-Saxon barrow-builders were not treading on virgin ground, indeed they may well have been aware of inheriting an older landscape. One might even suggest that the taking over of an ancient piece of land was deliberate policy on the part of relatively recent landlords intent on asserting in many different ways their power over a territory that was becoming the first Anglo-Saxon kingdom.

The field campaign completed a year ago was not the first to encounter extensive prehistoric occupation on the Sutton Hoo promontory; the campaigns of Basil Brown in 1938-39 and the British Museum in the 1960s and 1970s had already revealed that a Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age site lay buried beneath the Anglo-Saxon mounds. In particular, Drs. Longworth and Kinnes, in 1980, put forward the basis of a prehistoric sequence, vindicated by the last campaign, the recent findings occasionally putting flesh on

the bare skeleton that is pre-Saxon Sutton Hoo.

The first signs of occupation at Sutton Hoo date to the Middle-Late Neolithic (mid-3rd millennium BC), betrayed by a number of pits containing flint implements, flint waste and pottery. The impression is of a widespread but ill-focused settlement (in the sense that there are no discrete nuclei of intensive occupation). Domestic activity is the most likely reason for this debris, but other ideas, including 'ritual deposits', may be put forward to account for pits where whole or nearly whole pots were smashed before deposition and then used to line the base and sides of these pits.

By far the most intensive period of activity on the Sutton Hoo promontory belongs to the Later Neolithic and Early Bronze Age c.2000-1600BC). It is to this time that the linear boundaries belong, criss-crossing the whole spur from Sutton Hoo House to Sutton Walks, and visible on air photographs. These boundaries are laid out apparently as part of a uniform and long-lived field-system, which



Excavated stretch of Neolithic/Early Bronze Age land boundaries (Photo: Nigel MacBeth).

persists well into the Bronze Age; where excavated, the broad ditches making up the system resolve themselves into a series of narrower 'gullies', recut up to five times and ending on the same spot, usually at junctions with another ditch.

Within these boundaries, a lot of activity was taking place, again domestic in nature and featuring ceramic styles such as Peterborough Ware, Grooved Ware, Beakers, Food Vessels and Collared Urns. Many of the postholes, stakeholes, hollows or scoops cut into the sandy sub-soil will never make up comprehensible structures; erosion (except under Anglo-Saxon mounds) having rubbed out all but the deepest features. Nevertheless, a settlement characterised by late southern Beaker pottery and flint artefacts still emerges: it consists of five nuclei of intensive occupation, set at 50-100m intervals on the promontory, each nucleus may correspond to an area divided from others by a major linear boundary. Two such areas are worthy of particular attention: the first contains a post built roundhouse, 5.5m in diameter featuring a south-east facing porch, and adjacent pits, preserved under Mound 2 and excavated in 1987-88 by Andrew Copp. The second contains a series of 16 pits excavated in spring 1992 to the east of Mound 1. The importance of this discovery is the unusual occurrence of a rich Beaker domestic assemblage (over 500 sherds) deposited as a single event.

Sometime during the Bronze Age linear land boundaries and settlement debris made way for a new form of structure: a strong fence of closely set posts enclosing an area of c.2400m² on the western edge of the Sutton Hoo promontory. Its position and change of alignment are a new departure and its solid construction suggests that livestock were kept (out or in?). This new structure and the findings of soil analysis, hint at an adaptation of the Sutton Hoo community to an increasingly pastoral regime during the Bronze Age.

Finally, a square or rectangular palisaded enclosure, 40m across and dated to the Iron Age by Darmsden Ware replaced the Bronze Age fenced enclosure. This enclosure, though ploughed in Roman times (as was apparently

the whole of the spur), may still have been visible in an eroded form in Anglo-Saxon times and may have influenced the location of the burial mounds. Mounds 18, 17, 5 and 6 lie along its course, and their central burials cut

its corners. This link between the prehistoric and historic past at Sutton Hoo, though tenuous, serves as a reminder that Sutton Hoo is a very rich and varied piece of the Suffolk landscape.

We have come full circle, back to the Anglo-Saxon site. Why bother with all this prehistory then? A simple answer would be that since the encounter with prehistoric remains was inevitable, and a lot of it has been mapped and excavated, it is our duty to make sense of it. This would however provide little incentive for the detailed analytical programme and publication, now underway at the University of York. It is much more satisfying to approach Sutton Hoo's prehistory as a bonus granted by the Research Design. Although the shape of the excavated sample at Sutton Hoo is largely dictated by the topography of the Anglo-Saxon cemetery rather than by prehistoric remains, it has been a unique opportunity to see a whole hectare of Suffolk Sandlings uncovered and even more gratifying to establish its long-lived, changing and sometimes very rich prehistory.

Dr. Madeleine Hummler has been associated with the Sutton Hoo Research Project, in one form or another, since 1983. She is a part-time Research Fellow at the University of York and it is her job to see the prehistoric remains uncovered at Sutton Hoo through to publication.



Postholes of the Beaker roundhouse (Photo: Nigel MacBeth).



The Bronze Age fence running northwards under the site of Mound 2. The Beaker roundhouse is to its right (Photo: Nigel MacBeth).

SOCIETY EVENTS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM took place at Woodbridge School on Friday 8th January. In the absence of the Hon. Sec., the Chairman reported a reasonable year in which membership numbers had held steady, although the numbers of visitors were down. This however appeared to be part of a general trend observed at other similar sites and museums. The Chairman had attended the first meeting of the Sutton Hoo Management Committee which, in addition to the Society, included representatives from Suffolk County Council, English Heritage and the Sutton Hoo Research Trust. This committee will oversee the management and preservation of the Sutton Hoo site.

SPRING LECTURE

by Sam Newton

On Wednesday 24th March Jude Plouviez gave the Society an excellent illustrated lecture on the recently discovered late-Roman treasure-hoard from Hoxne in north Suffolk.

Beginning with an authoritative survey of late Roman Britain she painted a picture of a land where cities were in decline but where market towns such as Hacheston or Wen-haston were relatively thriving, and where country villa-estates such as Castle Hill, Ipswich appear to have been especially wealthy.

We were then shown several examples of late Roman treasure-hoards, which may represent attempts to safeguard wealth in times of uncertainty by temporary burial. The richest hoards are from Mildenhall—beautiful silver plates, bowls, spoons and goblets, and from Thetford—gold rings, bracelets, jewellery and many silver spoons, some inscribed with the name of the pagan god Faunas. Both hoards are displayed in the British Museum.

The Hoxne treasure is certainly among the wealthiest of hoards. It consists of a great quantity of high-quality gold and silver items, including jewellery, bracelets, plates, ladles, cups, spoons and over 13,000 coins, some in mint condition. This astonishing collection appears to have been packed in a great iron-bound chest or crate about a yard square and deposited sometime after the year 411 AD.

Larry Gatter retired as Hon. Secretary of the Society and was replaced by Jenny Glazebrook. Mike Weaver resigned and Nigel MacBeth was elected to the committee. The rest of the committee was elected *en bloc*.

The business meeting was followed by a lecture by Prof. Martin Carver on the Kingdoms of the North Sea. He outlined the way in which kingdoms emerged from chiefdoms around the North Sea area in the period between the 5th and 7th centuries AD. Some areas were Christian in the 5th century and others, further east and north, were pagan. In 6th-century Uppland (in modern Sweden), cremations in large burial mounds and ship-burials began to take place. Ship-burials also appeared in the Valsgärde region by the 7th

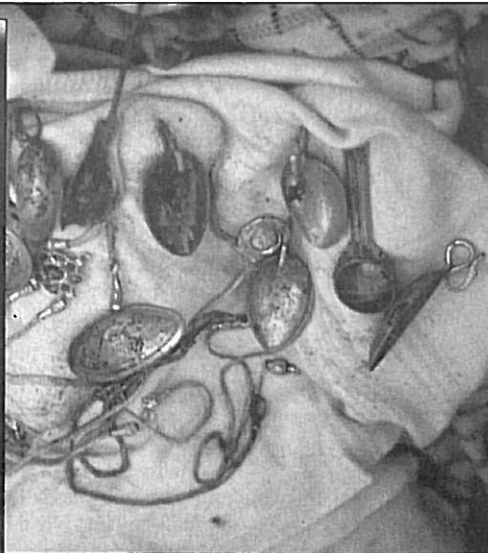
century – the same time that they occur on the east coast of England. In this context the North Sea served as a thoroughfare not a barrier to communication. The differences between Christian and pagan kingdoms led to conflicts of interest, and Prof. Carver sees ideas being expressed by differing burial practices rather than by writing. By the 8th century change was occurring. Kingdoms had emerged and Christian missionaries from Rome converted the kings of southern England. Trade began to be concentrated at particular locations, such as Ipswich, where taxation could be implemented, demonstrating that these kingdoms were much more powerful than the smaller chiefdoms of earlier times.



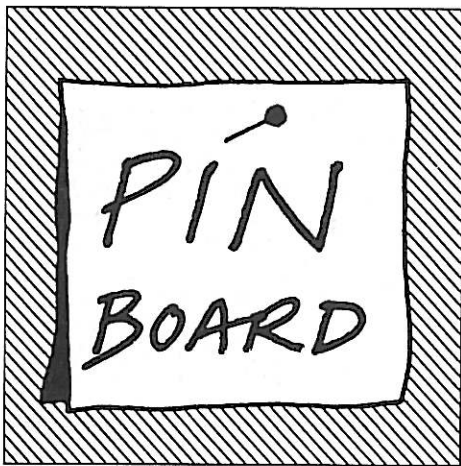
Excavation work in progress at Hoxne (Photo: Suffolk County Council Archaeological Unit).

We eagerly await the results of the examination of the treasures in the British Museum and of the investigation of the site at Hoxne. We are indebted to Jude Plouviez for her preliminary account of this latest of wonders from the soils of Suffolk and its late Roman context.

A group of silver spoons and gold jewellery from the excavation (Photo: Suffolk County Council Archaeological Unit).



Gold bracelets being lifted from the excavation (Photo: Suffolk County Council Archaeological Unit).



DIARY

SUTTON HOO: OPENING TIMES

There were guided tours of the site over Easter, and tours will continue on weekend afternoons at 2.00 and 3.00pm until September 4-5 this year. Don't forget, Society members can join the tours free of charge (just show your membership card).

TRIP TO NORTHERN SUFFOLK

Members are invited to join an outing to sites in Suffolk on **Sunday 12 September**. The trip will be led by Dr. Sam Newton, and include visits to Blythburgh, site of an Anglo-Saxon minster and burial place of King Anna (c.634-653); Bungay to look at the castle and have lunch, and lastly South Elmham, the site of a bishopruc established in 673 and site of an enchanting ruined minster. The tour bus will leave from Woodbridge at 9.30am, and return between 4.30 and 5.00pm. If you are interested in joining the tour, contact Andrew Lovejoy: 28 Pembroke Road, Framlingham, Suffolk IP13 9HA. (Tel. 0728/723214)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All through the winter months, Peter Berry has been hard at work on site in his official role as warden for the Sutton Hoo Trust. He's been scrapping equipment and materials, clearing buildings and debris, seeking tenders for protective fencing, and assisting regrowth of the grass by clearing stones and invasive weeds. After all his efforts it is hard to imagine the state of the site just one year ago – bare earth and flint nodules everywhere. Keep up the good work, Pete!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Committee members were saddened by the death of Larry Gatter, in January. Larry was an active and loyal committee member and a hardworking site guide, who must have entertained hundreds of visitors with the story of Sutton Hoo over the years. He will be very much missed. See Obituary, below.

APPEALS

GUIDES, GUIDES, GUIDES . . . although excavations are no longer in progress at Sutton Hoo, many people still want to see the site for themselves. The Society guides are providing a vital link with the public at a time when a new exhibition and presentation scheme are at the planning stage. The present guides would welcome help from new volunteers – if you think you could show people around, please contact Andrew Lovejoy (address above).

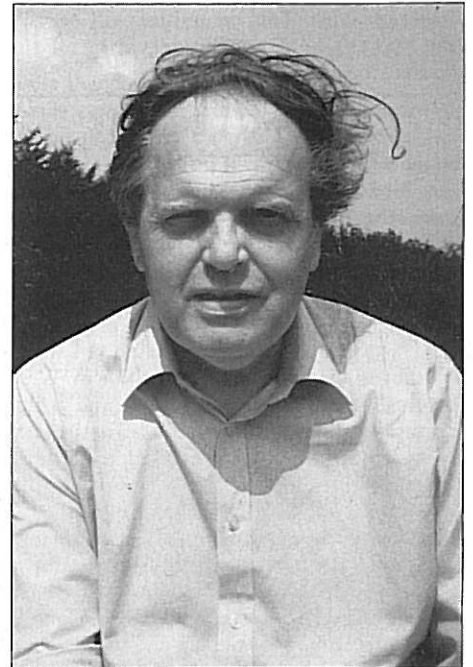
SALES

BULLETIN No 8/9 due out soon (it's at the printers). Includes final report on the excavations at Sutton Hoo. Copies can be obtained from Madeleine Hummler at the Department of Archaeology, University of York (address below).

SAXON . . . backnumbers (£1.25 each including post and packing) are available from Andrew Lovejoy (address above).

SNAPE ANGLO-SAXON CEMETERY . . . For information and souvenirs, contact the excavation Director: William Filmer-Sanke, 71 Southfield Road, Oxford OX4 1NY.

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).



Larry Gatter, (Hon. Sec. of the Society), who died in January this year.

LAWRENCE GATTER

I first met Larry Gatter back in the early 1960s when he was living at Nacton and working at Fisons. His job later took him to Bristol, but the Gatters subsequently returned to Suffolk and bought a house at Bromeswell. This house was kept when he moved to Fisons at Immingham and the Gatters returned to it when Larry (always Lawrence to his family) finally took early retirement.

Larry had a busy and demanding job in management at Fisons, and was at a bit of a loose end when we met again. He had been on a guided tour around Sutton Hoo one Sunday with his family and thoroughly enjoyed it. I suggested he might like to be a guide and he took up the idea with énthusiasm. In his scientific training and time at Fisons he had never had any reason to come into contact with Anglo-Saxons, but he quickly became a willing convert and read about the subject avidly.

When a new secretary was needed for the Society, Larry was an obvious choice. He was trained to be a guide by Bob Beardsley and had spent many weekends at the site. Larry's long experience in committee work and organisation meant that the Society's business ran quietly and with total efficiency. It is sad that he will not see the new presentation scheme for the site evolving.

Robert Simper, Chairman

Contact Addresses:

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The Sutton Hoo Society, c/o NatWest Bank plc, Cumberland Street, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 1JD.

Who's Who – Sutton Hoo Society Committee Members

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Saxon Produced by Editor: Rosemary Hoppitt Sub-Editor: Jenny Glazebrook Layout and design by Graphics Factory