



The Newsletter of the Sutton Hoo Society

SAXON

President: the Duke of Grafton KG

No. 20 / 1994



Replica viking ship, Edda (Photo: Don Lee, BBC)

SUTTON HOO AND THE SEA:

a resumé of Martin Carver's AGM lecture, by Jenny Glazebrook.

Archaeological evidence indicates the importance of boats throughout history from the Ice Age onwards, and it seems that from early times the North Sea acted not as a barrier, but a thoroughfare.

Similarly, archaeological evidence suggests sea-loving Anglo-Saxons rather than a people not in control of the element. The evidence comes in the form of buried ships (*e.g.* Gokstad), and numerous wrecks. These ships have such shallow drafts only a beach would have been needed for landing, and taxes and customs could be avoided.

The Scandinavian countries and Finland have been active in replicating historic

vessels — starting with Andersen's version of the Gokstad ship, which was sailed to Chicago in the 19th century for the Columbus celebration. More recently, Thor Heyerdhal built replicas of South Pacific reed boats and covered formidable distances in them. Experiments like these may not prove that such journeys took place, but they do demonstrate the possibility.

Even without modern navigation methods, blue-water crossings of the North Sea would have been quite feasible for the Anglo-Saxons using natural navigational aids: the feel of the wind, position of the sun, noise of the water against the gunwale, and

the movement of wildlife. The prevailing winds in the North Sea favour traffic towards England, since during summer they blow SW, while the more dangerous winter winds blow strongly NE. A modern parallel for such journeys is provided by Norwegian crossings to Scotland during World War 2, by people in small boats carrying cargo.

So far as we know, the first early northern boats were skin-built over a frame (like coracles), then dug-outs or 'expanded dug-outs' like the recent finds from Snape, or clinker-built like the Sutton Hoo ship. No mast was found at Sutton Hoo, but this may be due to the circumstances of discovery and

!STOP PRESS!
see back page for details of visit of Sæ Wylfing

OBITUARIES

RUPERT BRUCE-MITFORD

Rupert Bruce-Mitford died suddenly on 10th March 1994. He had just completed his major synthesis on hanging bowls and had turned amongst other things to planning a lecture tour in America. For those of us who worked with him on his various academic projects in the British Museum, particularly on the three-volume publication of the Sutton Hoo ship burial, his death marks the end of an era as well as the loss of a mentor and friend.

Various writers have described Rupert as an archaeologist, but although he directed excavations on several sites, with major projects at Mawgan Porth (1949–54) and of course, Sutton Hoo (1965–70), in essence he was an art historian. Amongst his most telling publications are those in which he used his gifted eye for the intricacies — and delights — of Anglo-Saxon art styles. He did however dearly love excavating and the freedom of working in the field, where he could enjoy both the intellectual challenge of archaeological interpretation and the pleasure of entertaining colleagues and friends in relaxed if windswept surroundings.

Rupert's distinguished career was spent almost entirely in the British Museum which he joined as a young assistant keeper in 1938. The museum provided the springboard from which he realised nearly all his major work, and although his achievements were wide ranging, his name is irretrievably linked with Sutton Hoo, which inevitably dominated his museum career.

By 1947 he had produced the first edition of *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*, a guide to the burial and its contents, charmingly sub-titled 'A Provisional Guide', which remained in print in succeeding editions until 1986. He also supervised the initial restorations (by Herbert Maryon) of the shield, the helmet, the drinking-horn complex and the musical instrument. In subsequent years his interest in the kingdom of the East Angles deepened and apart from papers on various aspects of the Sutton Hoo

ship burial, he published on Rendlesham and Snape.

In 1965 he instigated the first post-war investigation of the Sutton Hoo cemetery. After the completion of his excavation campaign, all his efforts were concentrated on finalising the text of the three volume publication of the finds from the 1939 ship burial (*The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*, Vol. 1, 1975, Vol. 2, 1978, Vol. 3, 1983), a massive contribution to Anglo-Saxon studies.

His interest in the Sutton Hoo cemetery was enduring and in the early eighties he was the moving force behind the decision to excavate again. His energy led to the formation of the Sutton Hoo Research Trust which instigated and supported the recent excavation project (1983–91) under the direction of Martin Carver.

There were many other strands that combined to make Rupert's life such a distinguished one — he was elected to the Society of Antiquaries in 1945 and was later secretary and then vice-president. He edited major publications including a facsimile edition of the Lindisfarne Gospels and *Recent Archaeological Excavations in Europe*. A collection of his papers, *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, was published in 1974 and his major survey of Celtic hanging-bowls, which he recently completed, will now be published posthumously.

He gave of his knowledge freely, both in major lecture series and with equal pleasure to archaeological societies throughout the country. He believed firmly in communicating in any media, and tried his hand at television in the first series of *Animal, Vegetable or Mineral* and later in Paul Johnstone's memorable film for BBC 2 *The Million Pound Grave*.

Above all he was an enthusiast who enjoyed nothing more than to enthuse others with his astonishing range of knowledge, his humour and his deep love of all things Anglo-Saxon — and Sutton Hoo in particular.

by Angela Care-Evans



Rupert Bruce-Mitford (left) with John Warburton (Photo: Rosemary Hoppitt)

RUPERT BRUCE-MITFORD

Rupert Bruce-Mitford was a great Anglo-Saxon scholar, an explorer of the whole people. Like all of us he was more at home in some fields than others; but he knew that the whole perspective was theirs and we should try to make it ours too. For me his most inspiring work was actually that on the Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts, and particularly the detective work on the Codex Amiatinus. When he pointed out that the manufacture of that 'Codex Grandior' had required 515 calves, it opened up a range of academic interactions which has influenced me ever since.

His first publication of Sutton Hoo was the most compendious ever produced for a British archaeological site. Some complained that it was too big (bigger than a Codex Grandior) and took too long in coming. But it should be remembered that he first produced the famous British Museum guide in 1947, almost as soon as he had taken over the responsibility for the find after the war; it ran to numerous editions keeping pace with research, and was used by generations of students as a serviceable interim until the three volumes of the final report appeared in the 70s. It would not be wise to assume that the immense amount of research contained in this work is likely yet to be superseded.

When Rupert handed the Sutton Hoo baton to me in 1983, he did so with a gentle wisdom and encouragement that I had done nothing to deserve. It is no small feat to hand over the responsibility for your life's work to someone else, and then remain interested in the new campaign without interference or resentment. That was because, for him, the site and the Anglo-Saxons who made it were the real immortals, rather than any of us.

We were in correspondence up to the end, exchanging anecdotes on Charles Phillips and other aspects of the Sutton Hoo story; of which Rupert himself is a mighty part. The saddest thing is that he did not live to discuss the results of the new campaign in their final form; his opinion and his verdict would have been of enduring value.

by Martin Carver

Mrs ANNIE TRANMER

Mrs Tranmer, owner of the Sutton Hoo estate, died just before Christmas.

She had been the owner of the Sutton Hoo monument throughout the life of the present Sutton Hoo Research Project, and the Sutton Hoo Society. Her house, with its beautiful views of the Deben valley, the woods, the reedy river banks and the tidal reaches, is an idyllic residence for someone seeking peaceful retirement; so it can never have been easy for her to have a world-famous archaeological site so close. The ever-curious public, searching for the Sutton Hoo of their dreams, walked through her gates, around (or occasionally over) her flower beds, shouted at her dog and knocked on her door, before being gently directed to their proper destination. It was to mitigate this potential nuisance that the Sutton Hoo Society was formed — to allow the visitors

to find their destination, while protecting the amenity of the landowner.

The excavations themselves also attracted more than a hundred students and professional archaeologists from many countries every summer — and an excavation team is never the most conventional community, fond of lighting fires, singing, dancing and making merry. Jenny Glazebrook and I did our utmost over the years to ensure that our project should never become the source of annoyance to Ann. If we succeeded, it is owed as much to her. She was a wonderfully straightforward person, and you knew where you were with her. It was agreeable to sit in her drawing room, admiring the view of one of the most attractive parts of East Anglia, a welcome glass of gin in one's hand, and looking at the dig from 'the other side'. That gave us a good idea of how much we owed to her tolerance and unobtrusive support.

by Martin Carver



DIARY

VISIT OF SÆ WYLFING

Edwin Gifford's half-scale replica of the Sutton Hoo ship (see **SAXON 19**) will visit the River Deben and Woodbridge over the weekend of 11-12 June. She will sail (weather permitting) upriver on the tide, arriving in Woodbridge at about 1pm on the Saturday and at about 1.45pm on the Sunday. We hope she will show her paces both under sail and oars, on the river in front

of the promenade between the Yacht Club and Frank Knights' boatyard.

On the Saturday evening there will be a get-together and **fish-and-chip supper** for Society members and friends, at Woodbridge Cruising Club (7.00 for 7.30pm). Drinks will be available from the bar all evening. Edwin and Joyce will be our guests, and they have indicated that they will be happy to talk informally about Sæ Wylfing. Admission will be by ticket only. Tickets, at £3.00 each, are available from Sue Banyard, Flat 2, Old Rectory Court, Melton, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 1NL. Please make cheques payable to the Sutton Hoo Society and enclose SAE.

Please contact either Robert Simper on 0394 411273 or Peter Rooley on 0440 730918 if you need information about the event *other than* tickets for the supper.

TRIP TO NW SUFFOLK

Members are invited to join an outing to sites in Suffolk on Sunday 11 September. The trip will be led by Dr Sam Newton, and include a visit to Thetford. If you are interested in joining the tour, contact Andrew Lovejoy for information (address below).

SUTTON HOO: OPENING TIMES
Site tours began at Easter (4 April) and will continue to run on weekend afternoons at 2.00 and 3.00pm until 4 September this year.

ERRATA

AND WHAT OF THE SHIP?

by Edwin and Joyce Gifford
(see **SAXON 19**, p.3)

In error we noted that Ottor was full size — it is in fact a half-size replica of the Graveney boat from Kent; in addition the 4th century boat from Nydam with the projecting keel was constructed of pine, and is distinct from the oak boat which is the one displayed, and does not have a keel projection.

APPEALS

GUIDES, GUIDES, GUIDES ... our present guides would welcome help from new volunteers — if you think you could show people around the site, please contact Andrew Lovejoy (address below).

'THE SUTTON HOO MOB': A REVIEW by Mike Weaver

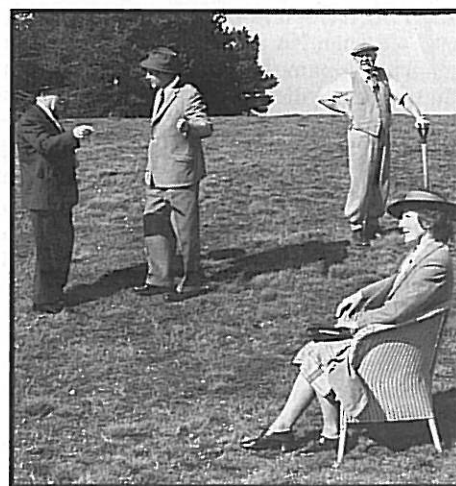
Peppy Barlow's new play, 'The Sutton Hoo Mob', specially commissioned for the Eastern Angles Theatre Company, rattled around East Anglia from February to May and I caught up with it at Orford. It has been well reviewed and well received by audiences. Orford Town Hall was packed to the rafters and the applause at the end testified to the public's pleasure.

The small set, a tranche of Mound 1, designed for ease of movement across the region, worked well — especially in the round. Wheel-barrows and bikes moved effortlessly around it and over it. It produced treasures. The players had worked hard on characterisation but were severely hampered in having to play too many roles. Charles Phillips and Reid Moir, both irascible characters at the best of times, were portrayed by the same actor.

The best scenes were the longest ones — the Mound 1 tea party, for example, where there was opportunity for fuller exploration of character and moments of subtle humour.

The story then was the tale of the hierarchy of academic snobbery and petty jealousy which clouded the excavation at Sutton Hoo in the summer months of 1939. 'Brown' was the mere servant of the Ipswich Museum and held in little regard by Reid Moir; Ipswich Museum was held in even less regard by the officials of the British Museum and the academics of Cambridge. Edith Pretty, the owner of the site, mediated and appeased and brought the warring factions together over a cuppa.

The play is Basil Brown's apologia. He emerges as the hero; he confounds the experts and wins Phillips' grudging approval. The treasure is handed over to the BM and poor old Ipswich loses out. The audience liked it and even the kids sat fascinated. The Sutton Hoo story, then, has a still wider audience. That must be a bonus. I have to state, however, that the earth did not move for me.



The Sutton Hoo Mob: left to right Guy Maynard (Terence Dauncey), J Reid-Moir (Harold Saks), Basil Brown (Graham Colclough), and Mrs Pretty (Rosemary MacVie) (Photo: Peter Rooley)

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