



SUTTON HOO AND THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF EXECUTION *a résumé of the Spring Lecture by Andrew Reynolds*



Fig. 1 *A decapitated corpse from the group of burials situated on the eastern edge of the site at Sutton Hoo*
(Photograph: Nigel MacBeth)

One shall ride the high gallows and upon his death hang until his soul's treasury, his bloody bone-framed body, disintegrates. There the raven black of plumage will pluck out the sight from his head and shred the soulless corpse...

This passage, from the later 10th-century poem **The Fortunes of Men**, aptly describes the scene that a traveller or local would have encountered when passing by Sutton Hoo, the former burial place of the kings of early East Anglia. For the Sutton Hoo cemetery came to serve as a place of execution and burial of offenders during or shortly after the last phase of high-status burial at the site. In this short offering I hope to show how the unusual burials at Sutton Hoo fit into the wider context of the archaeology of execution whilst drawing on a range of further sources, such as Old English poetry and prose, so as to put

some flesh on to dry bones - or sand in the case of the Sutton Hoo bodies!

The discovery of bizarre or unusual human remains on archaeological excavations frequently leads to speculation about the various causes which may account for the finds. The types of burial evidence which invite such interest are characterised by the finding of face-down corpses, mass burials, the absence of skulls or limbs from the burial deposit or evidence of violence in the form of cut marks to the skeleton. The unexpected discovery of two groups of unusual burials at Sutton Hoo has provided a platform for renewed discussion of such remains. The association of the two groups of unusual or 'deviant' burials with the remarkable high-status graves at the site gave grounds for much initial speculation. Foremost among the early interpretations of the burials was the possibility that evidence for human sacrifice had been

found. The concept of human sacrifice in ancient populations is an emotive subject. In terms of well-excavated archaeological traces, it had apparently eluded archaeologists until the discovery of the grisly remains both around Mound 5, and at the eastern limit of Martin Carver's excavations.

The Deviant Burials from Sutton Hoo

There is neither the space nor the need here to rehearse the details of each of the 'deviant' burials from Sutton Hoo and a summary will suffice for our purposes. Group 1 lay on the eastern periphery of the recent excavations and comprised twenty-three burials of which five were prone and two were found in a 'kneeling' position; decapitations were also present (see Fig. 1 above). The enigmatic 'ploughman' also lay amongst this group. Whilst early

provisional interpretations favoured a religious sacrificial explanation, the significance of a series of postholes in the immediate vicinity has since been realised. These are now seen as marking the site of a double-post gallows of a type illustrated in the early 11th-century manuscript Cotton Claudius BIV (see Fig. 2).

Group 2 were disposed about Mound 5 (see Fig. 3) and it is this group which shows the closest affinities with about twenty other excavated sites spread over southern and eastern England. The Group 2 burials comprised sixteen inhumations, including three prone bodies. Additional human remains were recovered from two graves and one corpse was found folded in half.

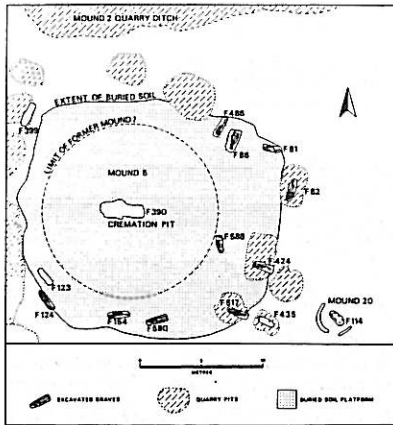


Fig. 3 Plan of Sutton Hoo Mound 5 showing the execution burials (after Carver, 1992)

Interpretations

As noted above, interpretations of groups of deviant burials are varied and there has been little attempt to classify the characteristics that might be exhibited by the burials of execution, massacre, battle or plague victims, which would allow a more informed identification of each type. Early commentators on finds of deviant burials commonly made reference to battles and massacres recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle or other such annals in an attempt to explain such finds. The execution site at Bran Ditch, Cambridgeshire, for example, was seen as the result of harrying by the Danes in 1010, whilst the execution cemetery at Guilddown, Surrey was partially explained in the light of a massacre perpetrated by Earl Godwin of Kent in 1036. At Sutton Hoo, however, the intercutting graves found in Group 1 and the varied orientations of the graves in both Groups 1 and 2 indicate burial over an extended period. Battles, massacres and plagues are far more likely to produce mass burials with specific age, gender and injury patterns.

The range of body positions represented by the Sutton Hoo finds is broad and surely meaningful. A number of archaeologists have proposed that status of an individual in life can be linked to the amount of labour invested in the burial rite. The evidence from execution cemeteries, however, suggests that this approach requires revision as the burials of members judged to be at the very lowest social level often exhibit characteristics that indicate greater effort than those observed in the standard Christian burials of the Anglo-Saxon period. This feature indicates the lengths that those responsible for



Fig. 2 A judicial hanging from the early 11th century. (By permission of the British Library: BL MS Cotton Claudius BIV)

the administration of justice were prepared to go in making a clear distinction between the 'good' and the 'bad' in society.

Pagans to Christians and the Burial of Social Deviants

In the pagan Anglo-Saxon period it seems that wrongdoers were buried in the community cemeteries. Evidence for this is found in the form of prone burials, decapitations and bodies weighted down with stones and it seems that once such community requirements had been met, certain of the corpses were then buried by the wrongdoers' families; an interpretation which would explain why a proportion of deviant burials from pagan cemeteries are found buried carefully and with grave finds. The archaeology of the Conversion of the English to Christianity is a complex subject, but it can be stated with some confidence that the motivations for changing burial rites throughout the 7th and 8th centuries are linked as much to changes in inheritance patterns, social ties, the growth of commercial centres and the increasing centralisation of wealth as to the influence of Christianity. One

aspect of the burial evidence, however, probably has everything to do with the adoption of Christianity and with the central role played in the administration of justice by the church: social deviants were no longer buried in the community cemeteries. Outcasts were now to be buried separately from converts and, although wrongdoers were regarded as heathens, the mode and location of their execution was clearly dictated by a biblical model.

Sutton Hoo in Context

There is a clearly defined, but until now poorly researched, category of Anglo-Saxon cemetery which exhibits all of the distinctive features recognised in the Sutton Hoo 'deviant' burials. These are the burial places of individuals executed for their offences and prohibited from Christian burial. About twenty execution sites are known and a discussion of certain of these will be sufficient to provide a context for the Sutton Hoo burials.

At South Acre, Norfolk, John Wymer has excavated the remains of over 130 execution victims. The focus of the cemetery was a large round barrow. Indicators of deviant burial included prone corpses, decapitations and possible instances of bound or tied legs. The site lay close to the meeting point of the boundaries of three Hundreds; the Hundred being the judicial territory in Anglo-Saxon England. Similarly, at Dunstable, Bedfordshire, the excavation of a round barrow in the 1920s revealed over ninety bodies with one prone burial and a large number of bodies with their hands tied behind their backs (see Fig. 4). At Stockbridge Down, Hampshire, forty-one bodies were found associated with a deliberately built and probably contemporary mound, again examples of prone burial, decapitation and tied hands were found. Other sites bearing these characteristics are known at Galley Hills and Guilddown, Surrey, Roche Court Down and Old Sarum, Wiltshire and Wor Barrow, Dorset among others.

The positioning and treatment of the Sutton Hoo deviant burials can be paralleled at a number of other sites and the choice of a barrow or barrow cemetery as a suitable place for executions to take place was evidently standard practice for the Anglo-Saxon authorities. A common pattern, therefore, can be observed, with a distinctive range of burial practices on the one hand and specific cemetery location on the other.

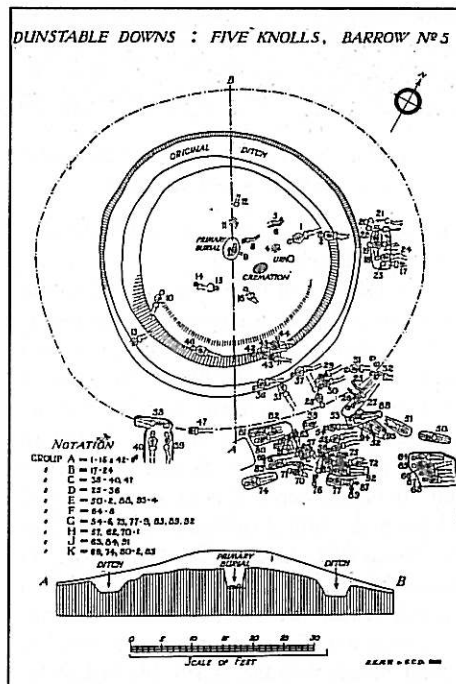


Fig. 4 Plan of the later Anglo-Saxon execution site at Dunstable, Bedfordshire (after Dumming and Wheeler, 1931)

The Ideology of the Execution and Burial of Offenders

It can be proposed that the imagery of execution in Anglo-Saxon England was founded on a firmly biblical model. The choice of barrows may reflect a desire to represent the hill of Golgotha, where Christ was hanged with the two thieves, whilst the instances of triple burials found at execution sites from Yorkshire to Surrey provides supporting evidence for this interpretation. In this context it is relevant to quote the Old English poem **Christ III**, which relates how '*...those seduced by sins, dark evil doers, will fearfully stare in distress... [at the crucifixion scene]...; they will see as their ruin that which would have best befitted them...*'. The choice of barrows may also be connected with Germanic myth as it is well known that the Anglo-Saxons considered barrows to be the dwelling places of demons and dragons. It seems that in addition to the denial of burial in consecrated ground wrongdoers were sentenced to endure eternal torment in the houses of supernatural monsters. The torment suffered by

the 8th-century Saint Guthlac in his cell inside a barrow is a good example of middle Anglo-Saxon attitudes to such places and, among a number of other references, the Old English **Maxims II** states that '*The Dragon belongs in its barrow...*'. There is a wealth of evidence from the series of Anglo-Saxon charter boundaries, which frequently describe places of execution. Among the terms used are *cwealmstow* and *hæþenan byrgels*. The former term is used in the Old English bible to describe Golgotha and the latter term, so often taken to mean 'pagan Anglo-Saxon cemetery' reflects the contemporary status of wrongdoers denied burial in consecrated ground in the Christian period. Boundaries were the natural repository for the burials of outcasts and the great majority of excavated execution cemeteries mentioned in the boundary clauses are sited on the boundaries of Hundreds. Sutton Hoo itself lies a short distance from the river Deben which formed a natural boundary for the Hundred of Wilford.

In conclusion, it can be seen from this brief survey that the use of the Sutton Hoo cemetery as a place for the execution of offenders fits well

within the context of post-Conversion judicial organisation. The discovery and meticulous excavation of the execution victims at Sutton Hoo has provided an unexpected snapshot of one of the essential instruments of kingship made altogether more significant by the 7th-century dates for the earliest executions and the association with a site of undoubted royal status.

*For a more detailed account of the archaeology of execution see: Reynolds, A. 1997 'The Definition and Ideology of Anglo-Saxon Execution Sites and Cemeteries', in G. De Boe and F. Verhaeghe (eds), **Death and Burial in Medieval Europe. Papers of the Medieval Europe Brugge 1997 Conference, Volume 2.***

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NATIONAL TRUST PROGRESS: THE LOTTERY GRANT

This is an edited version of the press release issued by the National Trust on 12 August 1997 following the award of the Heritage Lottery grant to develop Sutton Hoo. The announcement was made at Sutton Hoo House, at an event attended by a broad group of interested parties.



Representatives of the Sutton Hoo Society, the National Trust, The Heritage Lottery Fund and others assemble at Sutton Hoo House on the day the National Trust was granted £3.6 million to develop the Sutton Hoo estate. (Photograph: Peter Rooley)

The Heritage Lottery fund has awarded the National Trust a £3.6 million grant which will safeguard the future of the internationally important Anglo-Saxon burial site at Sutton Hoo. The National Trust has been offered the 96 hectare (232 acre) Sutton Hoo estate, which includes the Anglo-Saxon burial site and Sutton Hoo House and Stables, as a gift by the owners, the Trustees of the Annie Tranmer Charitable Trust. The grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund means that the National Trust can now accept the gift of the Estate, increase public access and adapt existing buildings to provide visitor reception and exhibitions. The exhibitions will tell the story of the Sutton Hoo

burials and the programme of excavations from the original discovery of the Sutton Hoo treasure in 1939, to more recent work carried out by Professor Martin Carver of the University of York and the Sutton Hoo Research Trust. It is hoped that the exhibitions and the footpath network will be enjoyed by over 50,000 visitors annually. Sutton Hoo House will be renamed Tranmer House, and will hopefully be developed as an education centre. Funding for this part of the project has come from the Annie Tranmer Charitable Trust and legacies left to the National Trust. In the long term it is hoped to reinstate a wing on Tranmer House which will allow the development of residential courses.

The total funding for the Sutton Hoo project is as follows: £3,600,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund, £700,000 from the Airedale, King and Laws bequest left to the National Trust, £200,000 from the Annie Tranmer Charitable Trust, £100,000 secured by Suffolk coastal District Council from European Community Konver funds, £50,000 from the Rural Development Commission and £20,000 from Suffolk County Council. The National Trust will also be launching an appeal for £100,000 to complete the funding arrangement.

As well as exhibitions, the visitor reception area will include facilities for school and family visits, a tearoom and a shop. A car and coach park and safe access from the public highway will be created. The needs of visitors with disabilities will be considered in the scheme, including good visual access at the burial site. Discreet information complementary to the exhibitions in the visitor reception area, will be placed on site to help interpret the burial ground. A footpath network will be developed on the whole estate to increase opportunities for informal access, and views will be opened up to the River Deben which will help visitors to

understand the relationship between the river and the burial site.

Grazing will be introduced on the acid grassland to help enhance the diversity of the vegetation and the introduction of heather will be considered.

The National Trust will be working closely with the Trustees of the Annie Tranmer Charitable Trust, the British Museum, Suffolk Coastal District Council, Suffolk County Council, the Sutton Hoo Society, and University College Suffolk in the development of the Sutton Hoo project.



The BBC carried live interviews from the site on the lunchtime news. Their mobile telescopic aerial towers over Mound 2. (Photograph: Peter Rooley)

THE WUFFINGS

We report here on the Society's involvement with the Eastern Angles' Theatre Company's production of *The Wuffings*; a play which explored possible events surrounding Rædwald's burial.

Firstly a brief letter from Ivan Cutting, Eastern Angles' artistic director and co-author of the play with Kevin Crossley-Holland. That is followed by a report on the education project run by Eastern Angles, which was partly funded by the Sutton Hoo Society.

The Wuffings by Ivan Cutting

'Finally after a lot of talk and extensive planning *The Wuffings* opened to a sell-out run. It played to 8,000 people during its three-week run in July, got rave reviews, national press coverage and a full half-hour documentary on Anglia TV.

Our office was overwhelmed by phone calls for tickets and we must apologise to anyone who tried to get through in the week following the opening. We were deluged and could probably have sold most of the tickets twice-over.

Reactions to the production swept into our office: many people came back more than once; many letters asserted that it had been one of the best things they had ever seen; some hated it; and some thought the most important thing was that it was done at all.

The Wuffings surpassed all our expectations and proved that Sutton Hoo holds a very special place in the hearts of those regarding themselves as East Anglians.'

The Wuffings Education Project by Karen Draisey, Education Co-ordinator and Rebecca Farrar, Administrator

When we first discussed the idea of Drama/History-based education activities to run alongside *The Wuffings*, the Sutton Hoo Society seemed a natural partner. The result of its support was a project which enabled a broad spectrum of people to enjoy a variety of workshops, an informative exhibition at the performance site and various pre- and post-show discussions and debates, as well as the

Right: Karen Draisey and some of the pupils from Heath County Primary (Ipswich) in deep discussion

Below: Pupils from the school during their drama workshop (Photographs: Mike Kwasniak)



Ivan Cutting, how this information could be translated into a play. It provoked fascinating, stimulating, and at times, anarchic discussion!

specially designed trips to Sutton Hoo.

The first workshop was a special INSET course for primary teachers, presented as a series of three 'twilight' sessions. We had an enthusiastic response from the 13 teachers who attended 'Teaching history through drama', run by Karen, which focused on the Anglo-Saxons:

'This was one of the most stimulating twilight sessions I have been on'

During five one-day workshops, for a total of 224 seven-to-eleven year-olds, pupils were asked to consider what it meant to hold Pagan beliefs and to have them challenged by the advent of Christianity and the conversion of their king. They made clay pots and talismen and, using a drama session, debated issues contained in the play with an astonishing degree of understanding:

'I especially liked the clay modelling and the acting. I am going to visit Sutton Hoo soon. Thanks for a great day.'

Another workshop was designed for a group of long-term unemployed people in Lowestoft. Over a two-month period, prior to seeing the production, they met for a series of informal 'lectures' exploring with Dr Sam Newton the historical background, and with

'the course introduced me to an area of history which I had very little knowledge of... very engaging'

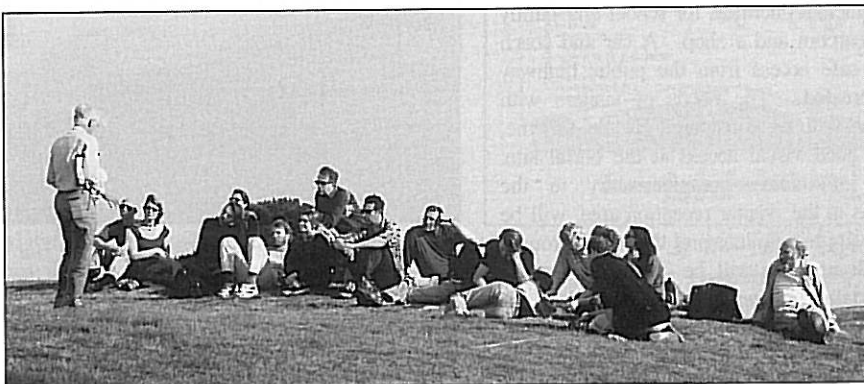
The programme successfully brought together school children, teachers, student trainees, education authority officers, academics, community groups and theatre practitioners in a truly co-operative artistic and educational venture. The company had a tremendously positive response to the programme, and, as a pilot project, will now feed into Eastern Angles' long-term development plans.

Below: Kevin Crossley-Holland (co-author), Rosemary Hoppitt (Society Chairman) and Ivan Cutting (Eastern Angles Artistic Director and co-author) at Sutton Hoo



Left: Stewart Salmond addressing the cast of *The Wuffings*, and members of Eastern Angles on Mound 1 before the beginning of rehearsals.

(Photographs: Peter Rooley)



SUTTON HOO IN THE MEDIA

A number of national and local newspapers carried reviews of *The Wuffings*, including the one shown here published in *The Guardian* newspaper on 12 July 1997 and written by drama critic Michael Billington. We are grateful to the *Guardian* newspaper for allowing us to include this item.

The Wuffings was the subject of the Anglia Television documentary programme *Backstage* broadcast in the Anglia region twice in the Autumn, and a preview which included another visit by Edwin Gifford's replica Mound 1 ship *Sæ Wylfing* to the River Deben. The site was also included in one of the programmes in the television series *Crown and Country*, narrated by Edward Windsor (HRH Prince Edward) broadcast in October. Filming on the site took place in the summer.

BBC Radio 4 is to broadcast a series of six programmes charting the development of the English language. American author Bill Bryson is the presenter, and was recently at Sutton Hoo recording Anglo-Saxon poetry recited by Dr Sam Newton.

The first programme in the series will be broadcast on **Saturday 13 December** at 4 pm, repeated on **Sunday 14 December** at 8.30 pm.

Right: Review published 12 July 1997, written by Michael Billington

The Guardian ©

A glorified potting shed provides a truly dramatic setting for an Anglo-Saxon epic. **Michael Billington** reports

Wyrd sisters (and brothers)

The oddity

We are used to theatre erupting in unexpected places: swimming-baths, tram-sheds, derelict shipyards. But Eastern Angles have broken new ground by staging *The Wuffings*, an ambitious play about paganism and Christianity in seventh-century England, in a vast potting-shed just outside Woodbridge in Suffolk. It is their contribution to the East of England's Year of Opera and Musical Theatre, and it certainly has a quasi-operatic grandeur.

Everything is on the epic scale. The stage itself is 90 feet wide and comprises 21 tons of sand. It is also filled with crucibles of flame, water-tanks and gleaming, metallic shields. And the play itself, written by Kevin Crossley-Holland and the show's director, Ivan Cutting, is unafraid of big themes: it deals with the religious and political conflicts caused by the shaky Christian conversion of the East Anglian King, Raedwald, whose wife Edith remained defiantly pagan. It even climaxes in the richly furnished ship burial of Raedwald at neighbouring Sutton Hoo.

But does it work? As a spectacle,



Christian act... Stephen Fingold as King Raedwald

it is undeniably impressive. Cutting knows how to create big effects through relatively simple means. Upturned church-pews evoke a boat journey from Kent, where Raedwald was baptised in 605, to Suffolk. A battle with the Northumbrian king is all war chants, woad, dry ice and burning crosses. And the final ship burial is eerily exotic as the wide stage fills with pillars of fire.

Cutting unashamedly uses a variety of techniques pioneered by

directors such as Peter Brook and Trevor Nunn. My main reservation, though, concerns the eclecticism of the text itself. Crossley-Holland, a poet and scholar, gives us an intriguing picture of the constant battle between *wyrd*, the pagan concept of fate, and the Christian word. But the over-allusive script combines a potted version of Beowulf, echoes of the Anglo-Saxon poems, copious Shakespearean references, including "the three sisters of *wyrd*", and modern colloquialisms: when the Lady Macbeth-like Edith remarks of a Christian missionary "That prick cuts no ice here", we seem to have strayed pretty far from the seventh century.

In short, the show lacks consistency of tone. But that doesn't invalidate a commendably ambitious project. I found the evening revived my interest in the Anglo-Saxon world, boasted one or two strong scenes — such as Raedwald's attempted murder of his Northumbrian guest, Edwin — and poignantly evoked the moment of Christianity's arrival on these shores at the very time when it was in danger of serious decline.

Stephen Fingold as the Janus-faced Raedwald, Carrie Thomas as the Woden-worshipping Edith also give strongly-defined performances, and Pat Whymark's harp-filled music lingers pleasantly in the memory. Even if, with its Athel-friths and Eorpwalds, it can't avoid a touch of 605 And All That, *The Wuffings* is a bold attempt to offer us history from an eastern angle.

At Notcutts Nurseries near Woodbridge (01473 211498), till July 27.

SOCIETY REPORTS

Guiding 1997

This has been a very successful season due to the good weather and the publicity surrounding the production of *The Wuffings*, and news of the National Trust and the Heritage Lottery grant. We have had 1921 paying adults and 187 under 18s, as well as an estimated 400-plus under 10s. In addition over 250 visitors came on tours specially put on for the weekend audiences of *The Wuffings*, and nearly 70 Society members and guests visited the site during the members' autumn excursion. Two lectures were given to Dunmow Rotary Club and Hoylake Historical Society. Fourteen other booked parties were shown round, including Dunmow Rotary Club; a sixth-form A-level group from Copleston and Holywells High School in Ipswich; a repeat visit by Rickmansworth PNEU School who again stayed nearby at Blaxhall Youth Hostel; the Icknield Way Association; Nottingham WEA, Kesgrave WI; a Walking Club from Upminster; and a group of National Trust Volunteers from Ickworth.

We have had to say farewell to three guides, but four new ones have started. Fresh volunteers are always welcome. We will continue with our normal operations throughout 1998, and look forward to another busy and satisfying season.

Membership

The Society currently has 328 members, of which 229 are ordinary members and 99 are life members.

May we remind members of the changes to the subscription which take effect from 1 January 1998. If you wish to change your membership type, then please indicate this when replying to Andrew Lovejoy with your subscription, details are included with your copy of **SAXON**.

We have agreed visiting arrangements for 1998 with the National Trust, and Sutton Hoo Society members will continue to enjoy the privilege of visiting the site on site tours free of charge.

World-Wide Presence

The Sutton Hoo Society now has a site on the internet. If you have access to the internet then the address is as follows:

<http://www.suttonhoo.org>

It is possible that your local library is connected to the internet; you will need to take the address with you, and type it into the address box on the computer screen.

The web site is mainly about the Society's aims and activities, but also carries a brief outline of the story of excavation at Sutton Hoo. There is information about membership, visiting arrangements, and the committee, whom you can now contact through e-mail. We have included photographs of the 1969 excavation of Mound 1 taken by Peter Rooley, and the 1969 excavation team taken by Derek Thorpe (see **SAXON** 16). Cliff Hoppitt has allowed us to use two of his aerial photographs of the burial site, one of which is used to create an interactive tour of the burial site with 'hot spots' to investigate.

SUTTON HOO SOCIETY AND THE NATIONAL TRUST: PROGRESS REPORT

The close co-operation between the Society and the Trust, working towards the goal of the effective presentation of the Sutton Hoo site and the wider estate, has begun already.

The Society had a valuable meeting with the National Trust in September to sort out the details of hosting visitors to the site in the period up to the opening of the new visitor centre. In 1998 the pattern of guiding and

visiting will go on in much the same way as it has in the past few years. The Society will continue to receive visitors and give guided tours, and the income from the tours will go to the Society. There will be minor changes, mainly imperceptible to the visitor, which relate to the fact that the National Trust will be owners of the site instead of the Trammer estate. As part of those changes, new

signposts and information boards will be put up at the entrances to the estate and along footpaths directing walkers around the public footpath network, as well signposting them towards the cemetery site.

There will be further changes in 1999, to make progress towards the opening of the full visitor facilities in 2001.

SOCIETY EVENTS

SUTTON HOO SOCIETY OUTING by Dr Sam Newton

On 21 September 1997 two coachloads of members were taken on a guided exploration of Sutton Hoo and related sites in S E Suffolk. Yet again our chosen day was blessed by very favourable weather. Sam's fascinating accounts were further enlivened by well-informed debate among members, which made the excursion all the more interesting and stimulating

Our thanks go to Sam for masterminding the trip, and to Andrew Lovejoy and Stewart Salmond for organisation of transport and arrangements on the day.

WALTON CASTLE

Here, the seasonally low tide enabled us to view the seaweed-shrouded stones which are part of the offshore remains of the walls of the Roman Saxon Shore fortress known today as Walton Castle. Identifiable as the late Roman fortress of *Portus Adurni*, it formed part of a chain of major defensive bases for naval and cavalry forces protecting the island of Britain from seaborne attack. Surviving descriptions from the 12th, 17th, and 18th centuries indicate that the fortress was sited on a ridged promontory rising up to a hundred feet above the sea. The deep valley now known as The Dip, across which we viewed the seaweed covered stones from part of the surviving cliffs, must have formed one side of this ridge.

Walton Castle was strategically sited to guard the approaches to the Deben and Orwell estuaries; the latter's entrance being originally further to the north than it is today. It is of interest to the Sutton Hoo Society because it is identifiable as one of the possible locations of *Domnóc*, named by Bede in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* as the site of the first East Anglian episcopal minster, given to St Felix by King Rædwald's step-son, King Sigeberht. The usual view is that *Domnóc* was located at another site now offshore further up the Suffolk coast at Dunwich, although this has never been fully demonstrated. Nothing is visible at Dunwich even at the lowest tides and there is no compelling evidence that it was a particularly important place before the

Right:

The remains of Walton Castle disappear beneath the waves at Felixstowe.

On the right is the valley known as The Dip. The cliff top indicates the original height of the castle site. (Photograph: Robert Simper)



Left:

Sam Newton demonstrates to members the possible position of the body in the Mound 1 burial chamber.

(Photograph: Robert Simper)

rise of its prosperity as a port during the 11th and 12th centuries. In siting his episcopal seat within the Roman walls of Walton Castle, St Felix would have been following a clear pattern of the early Christian re-use of important Roman sites. There are many examples of this re-use, including both neighbouring fortresses in the Saxon Shore defence line: at Burgh Castle to the north, guarding the estuary of the Yare, and at Bradwell to the south, guarding the estuaries of the Colne and the Blackwater (see *SAXON* 17 and 19). There appears to have been a church dedicated to St Felix within the walls of Walton Castle in the 12th century as Tim Pestell has pointed out in his recent thesis. This rare dedication, along with some interesting field names, and perhaps the place-name Felixstowe itself, considerably strengthen the case for Walton Castle as the site of *Domnóc*. Certainly it would have been within the heartland of the Wuffing kingdom of south-east Suffolk, the territory which

seems to correspond to the later grouping of Hundreds known as the Wicklow or the Liberty of St Etheldreda. If St Felix had stood on the elevated position of Walton Castle in the early 630s, he may even have been able to see the royal mounds at Sutton Hoo.

THE ROYAL BURIAL MOUNDS OF SUTTON HOO

Our second visit was to the royal burial ground at Sutton Hoo itself. Standing on the top of Mound 1, widely believed to be that of King Rædwald, we reviewed some of what is known about the site. After a brief reiteration of the wonderful story of the excavation of Mound 1 in 1939, I outlined some of the ways in which Old English and Old Norse literature can tell something of the close relation between the Anglo-Saxon rite of mound-burial and the genre of royal genealogical poetry, such as in the epic *Beowulf* and in the heroic catalogue poem *Widsith*. Although an

Old English genealogical poem concerned with the Wuffings has not survived, the existence of such a poem is indicated by a reference in the *Passio* of the late 8th-century East Anglian king and martyr, St Æthelbert. On the basis of this reference, and drawing on the echoes of genealogical verse in Old English heroic poetry, I have attempted to reinvent such a poem about the Wuffings, called the *Wuffingagetæl*, the 'Tally of the Wuffings'. Standing on the burial-mound of one of the greatest of the Wuffing kings, I suggested that its opening might have sounded something like this in Old English:

*Hwæt we ærwilum Wuffinga
peodena þrym gefrunon,
hu þa wulfcyningas weoldon æpeleard
EstEnglelond?
Hwa mæg seged soðe mære,
on hwilcum beorgum eacenbanas gebidian?*

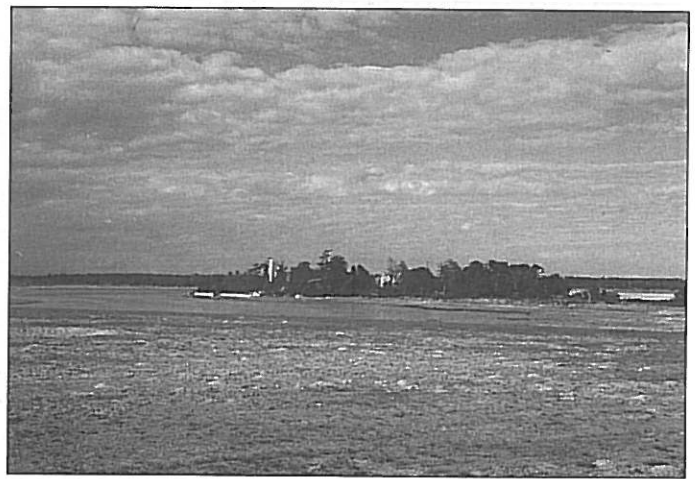
*What have we heard of the heroism
of the Wuffing folk-lords of long ago,
of how those wolf-kings commanded
East Anglia's ancestral soil? Who can tell of
their true fame
or in which barrows their mighty bones
sleep?*

This was followed by the recital of the account of the royal ship-funeral from the opening movement of *Beowulf* in the original Old English, again supplemented by a loose translation. This passage enables us to see something of the deeper beliefs associated with the royal rite of ship-funeral. The account of the hero's funeral at the end of the epic reveals insights into the rite of mound-burial. In particular, the prominent siting of his mound widely visible from the water seems to describe the heroic ideal which we find followed by the Wuffings at Sutton Hoo. Other examples include the royal burial mounds of the Norse kings of Vestfold overlooking Oslo Fjord at Borre.

The story of the death of Halfdan the Black, King of Vestfold and three surrounding territories during the 9th century, preserved in Snorre Sturlason's great collection of sagas of the Norse Kings, *Heimskringla*, sheds further light on the beliefs associated with royal burial mounds. King Halfdan died in a drowning accident some distance away from his home one spring. Snorre tells us that Halfdan's reign had been greatly blessed by good harvests and that, as a result, the people loved him very much. When news of his death became known, the leading folk of his four territories went to meet Halfdan's body. Each wishing to be able to bury the body in their own district, for they believed that whoever got it would have better harvests. After some debate it was agreed to divide the body into four parts and to build a mound for King Halfdan in each of the four territories, so that all of them could expect good crops. This story reveals something of the power with which certain royal mounds were held to be charged. In particular, there was believed to be a direct correlation between royal burial mounds and the fertility of the fields. This is

*A view of the former island
site of St Botolph's church,
Iken*

(Photograph: Sam Newton)



perhaps one of the reasons why burial mounds of successful kings like Rædwald are likely to have been venerated, as were the tombs of his Christian successors, like that of his nephew Anna at Blythburgh.

RENDELSHAM AND IKEN

After lunch we congregated in St Gregory's Church, Rendlesham, amid harvest supper preparations. Here we considered some of the current evidence for the site of the East Anglian royal hall and church at Rendlesham. The site is mentioned by Bede in his account of the baptism there, around the year 660, of the East Saxon king Swiðhelm at the hands of St Cedd., with Rædwald's nephew King Æðelwald standing as his godfather. The work of Rupert Bruce-Mitford, Norman Scarfe and John Newman suggests that King Æðelwald's church may have been a former temple, perhaps even the famous temple of the two altars described by Bede in his account of the baptism of King Rædwald. A well-built royal temple is likely to have been consecrated for Christian use in line with the policy for the conversion of the English specified by St Gregory and recorded by Bede in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. It is possible that the present later medieval church of St Gregory stands on the site of this temple. The royal hall itself may have stood a little to the north, where Naunton Hall now stands. However, a location for the main hall to the south, where Eyke Church now stands cannot be ruled out as Peter Warner has argued.

Our final visit of the day was to the spectacularly positioned church of St Botolf at Iken, built on a hill on a former island overlooking the Alde estuary within sight of the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Snape. Iken church is the likely site of the saint's original foundation noted in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for the year 654, alongside the reference to the death of King Anna.

*Her Omma cyning wearþ ofslægen; ond Botulf
ongon minster timbran æt Icanho.*

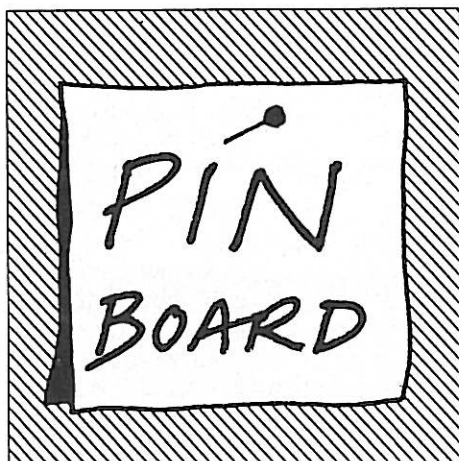
*Here [in this year] King Anna was slain; and
Botolf began to build [his] minster at Iken
Hoo.*

Here we heard about the fame of this once highly venerated saint. He still has over sixty churches dedicated to him and has a city and several towns and villages named after him. St Botolf appears to have been regarded as a major early pioneer of Benedictine monasticism in England by the church and as something of a protector and exorcist by the people. In Denmark, where his cult was probably introduced in the reign of King Cnut [1016-1035], he is still held to be the patron saint of travellers. It was suggested that, as St Christopher has recently been un-canonised, perhaps St Botolf should become the patron saint of travellers again in England.

Inside the church, we marvelled at the carved stone cross-shaft discovered by Dr Stanley West during his excavations at Iken Church in 1977. This shaft formed part of a large decorated stone cross, loosely datable by its style to the 9th or 10th centuries. Such a cross marks out the site as one of great importance at that time. The inclusion of dogs or wolves, St Botolf's emblem in medieval church art, in the zoomorphic design still recognisable on the shaft suggests that the cross could have been erected as a memorial to this famous saint. His body lay buried here after his death on 17th June 680, but in 970 his remains were moved with the consent of King Edgar to the spot where the church of St Botolph at Burgh-by-Woodbridge now stands. There they were housed for around fifty years until the time of King Cnut, who granted permission for his relics to be divided between several minsters, including Bury St Edmunds, Ely, and Thorney. At the west end of the great abbey of St Edmund at Bury, St Botolf's relics were venerated in his own shrine, the site of which can still be seen and which the Society visited in 1996 (see *SAXON* 25).

Thus somewhat charged by walking on the soil which St Botolf himself had blessed, and with the weather still holding fair, we embarked for home.

*Dr Sam Newton is a committee member of the Sutton Hoo Society and a site guide. He is the author of *The Origins of Beowulf and the pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia*, and teaches in adult education in Suffolk. This is the fifth Society outing that he has led.*



DIARY

SUTTON HOO SOCIETY AGM

The next **Annual General Meeting** will be held on **Friday 27 February 1998** in the **Sixth Form Centre at Woodbridge School, Burkitt Road, Woodbridge at 7.30pm** (see location map).

AGENDA

- Apologies
- Minutes of the last AGM
- Reports and Accounts
- Election of Auditors
- Election of Committee

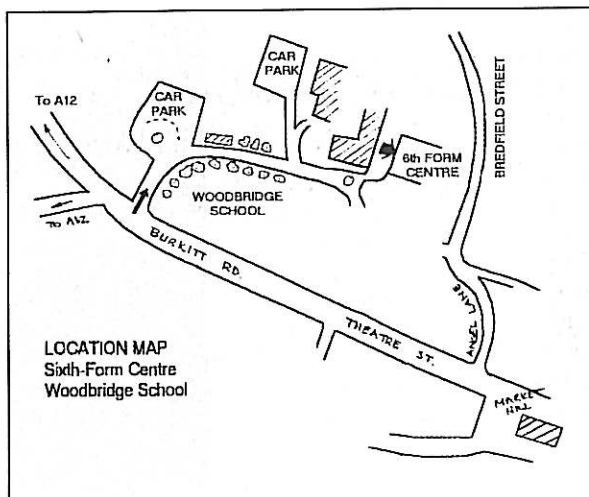
The business meeting will be followed by an address by representatives from the National Trust's Regional Directorate, and the project team appointed to implement the Sutton Hoo Development Project.

NEW MEMBERSHIP CHARGES

Can we remind members that new rates for membership apply from January 1998. If you want to change your membership (for example from adult to family), then please make sure that you give that information when returning your membership forms to Andrew Lovejoy, the membership secretary (address below).

SPRING LECTURE

The 1998 Spring lecture will take place in the **Science Lecture Theatre at Woodbridge School, Burkitt Road, Woodbridge** (see map) at **7.30pm on Wednesday 11 March**.



Chris Scull, from English Heritage, will give a lecture on the results of his current research on the material from the **Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries at the Butter Market and Boss Hall, Ipswich**.

1998 SEASON

The site will open on **Saturday 11 April** (Easter Saturday), and will continue to be open on weekend and Bank Holiday Monday afternoons until **1 November 1998**. This extended season is a trial to cover the schools' half-term, and the normal (hopefully!) Indian summer. Guided tours will begin at 2pm and 3pm. Entrance charges are £2 for adults and £1 for under 18s, children under 10 and Sutton Hoo Society members are free. Booked tours for organised parties can be made, by arrangement, for any day throughout the year. Please book in good time, by contacting the Visits and Guiding Secretary (address below).

DAY SCHOOLS: 1998

The University of East Anglia is holding two day schools in 1998 with an Anglo-Saxon flavour. At **Wensum Lodge, Norwich**, on **Saturday 7 March Nicholas Groves** will be examining the themes of **Heroes and Exiles in Anglo-Saxon Poetry**; and on **Saturday 1 August**, probably in Woodbridge, **John Pulleyn Appleby** will be looking at **Anglo-Saxon Sea Power**. For more information contact the Department for Continuing Education, University of East Anglia, NORWICH NR4 7TJ Tel: 01603 593266.

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Who's Who — Sutton Hoo Society Committee Members

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Membership Secretary: Andrew Lovejoy Visits & Guiding Secretary: Stewart Salmond Publicity: Peter Rooley
Publications: Rosemary Hoppitt
Jenny Glazebrook Lindsey Lee John Newman Sam Newton Pearl Simper Robert Simper Angus Wainwright

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

DATA PROTECTION

Membership records are held on a personal computer system. We use the data for two main purposes: to record membership, and to enable printing of address labels for sending you Society information, **SAXON**, etc. We do not disclose the data held. Any change in that policy would be publicised through **SAXON** to all members.

Below is a list of the information that we have on record:

Title, name and address; membership status (Ordinary, Life, Family, Student) and whether your subscription has been received for the current year; other status (site guide; committee member; 'local member' (Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, and Cambridgeshire) or Overseas member).

We are exempt from registration under the Data Protection Act, but in accordance with that exemption, **if you do not wish to have your details held on the computer, then please inform the Membership Secretary.**

WORLD WIDE PRESENCE

See Society Reports for more information.

APPEALS

GUIDES

Although we have had a number of new guides joining during the 1997 season, we would still welcome more so that we can spread the load evenly. We would also welcome more volunteer helpers to sell tickets, books and postcards in the hut.

If you are, or were once a teacher, then you would also be welcome to help with school parties. We publish a Teachers' information pack to help with history teaching, particularly at Key Stage 2.

If you are interested either in guiding, helping or the Teachers' pack, then contact Stewart Salmond for details (address below).