



The Newsletter of the Sutton Hoo Society

SAXON

President: The Earl of Cranbrook

No. 31 / 1999



Sherman Tanks of B Squadron, East Riding Yeomanry moving up in support of 51 Highland Division at Nederweert, in Holland, 20 November 1944. The tank in view had just crossed the canal-lock on a Sapper assault bridge and the picture shows clearly a Sherman's capacity to plough up the ground in soft going. (War Office Photograph)

Some Sutton Hoo Memories By Ted Wright

Looking through **SAXON** No 30, 1999, my eye caught the piece entitled 'The military move in...' and especially the passage headed "Burial Ship destroyed by US tanks". Perhaps members would like to have a brief account of the 'intervention' (to use the technical term!) of 1943 from one who was personally involved, and other recollections too.

At the time (1943) the Armoured Brigade (27th) in which my own regiment, the East Riding Yeomanry, were serving with the 4/7th Dragoon Guards and the 13th/18th Hussars, were billeted in the area round about Sutton Hoo; we ourselves at Rendlesham Hall. Two years earlier Charles Phillips had seen my brother's and my note about the find of the first of the Bronze Age boats at North Ferriby in the pages of **Antiquity** and had sent us an offprint of his outstanding preliminary report of the 1939 Sutton Hoo excavations published in the **Antiquaries Journal** (C. W. Phillips 'The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial', **Antiquaries**

Journal XX 1940). So naturally as soon as I had the chance I went over for a look at Sutton Hoo and found it with a somewhat abandoned appearance. The boat-trench was open but there was little of the "ghost" of the planking to be seen, although the iron rivets could be made out and there were a good many lying about loose.

The regiment was then in the process of converting from the British Valentine tank to the American-made Sherman, which at 32 tons was about twice the weight. My own 'command' was the Reconnaissance Troop of ten Bren Gun Carriers and I had little to do directly with the tanks. Somehow it came to my ears that the mounds at Sutton Hoo were being used by the Brigade's drivers for practising standing starts on the steep soft sand, and the tracks of course bit deeply. I started fulminating about this in the Mess and found a sympathetic audience in a guest who was staying with us while he was supervising

a comprehensive War Office equipment inspection. We kept in touch when he moved on to Brigade HQ. I found a couple of his letters written on 13th/18th Hussars' paper a few years ago and sent them to the British Museum for their archives. These explained how he had been able to arrange with the Brigade Staff to have the area wired off and put out of bounds. So the mounds were saved for the time being, although it did not stop the Home Guard and presumably the South Wales Borderers (see **SAXON** 30) from digging slit-trenches and leaving mortar bombs and such-like about the place. So that is the true story of the "US tanks", American made but British crewed!

The only other hand which I took in the affair was to send an account to the Assistant Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries, Philip Corder, who was an old friend from excavating days in East Yorkshire in the 1930s. He was the only person I could think



Ted Wright in uniform as a Lieutenant in the East Riding Yeomanry in c. 1942 aged 24.

of then who might have some influence in archaeological circles. There was in fact nothing useful that he could do about it.

After the end of World War 2, I got to know Charles Phillips quite well, first in connection with my North Ferriby boats over which he provided critical support in 1946-7. While the rescue excavations were going on in 1946, he and the other visitors stayed at my mother's in Ferriby and of an evening we heard much of the fascinating background to the 1939 campaign at Sutton Hoo, some tidbits still unpublished. Twenty years later I went to the Society of Antiquaries to hear from Rupert Bruce-Mitford and his team about the results of the 1960s re-excavation and recent research on the 1939 finds, and found myself sitting with Charles Phillips and his wife. During his lecture, Rupert was highly critical of certain aspects of the recording of the burial deposit, the actual dissection of it having been carried out by two archaeologists who rose in the hierarchy later and who were then the lightest members of the archaeological profession whom Phillips could find, Stuart Piggott and Leslie Grimes. Having his professional reputation denigrated publicly, the massive figure of Phillips began to seethe beside me and I did my best to soothe him down! The

next item in Rupert's discourse was the royal lyre and he had in his hands the Dolmetsch replica on which he promised a recital by his daughter. At that moment, affected no doubt by the heat generated by a packed audience, all the pegs holding the strings fired off into the auditorium and the recital had to be aborted. I lent across to Charles and whispered: "Now you have been vindicated!"

The only other piece of Sutton Hoo lore which I don't believe has ever been recorded concerns a chat I had with "Prof" Lindemann (Lord Cherwell) at Christ Church, Oxford, in 1947 when I was staying there with my old tutor to give a talk on the Ferriby boats to the Oxford Archaeological Society. The "Prof" was an old friend from pre-war and notably sympathetic to the young; and we got onto Sutton Hoo reminiscence. He then told me how he had been dining with the Director of the British Museum late in August 1939, and after dinner the Director had produced the pick of the Sutton Hoo treasure which had been deposited there before being stowed away for safe-keeping in the Underground extension. Apparently the assembled company had been passing the jewels round the table, "fingering the gold" as it were. I was relieved to know that none had apparently been lost!

Society Events

Autumn Excursion to Essex by Sam Newton

The 1999 Sutton Hoo Society outing was held on Sunday 26 September. Somehow the weather remained favourable all day, despite the forecast of showers, which was fortunate as Sam was again leading from the front on his motorbike.

Our first visit of the day was to the ancient causeway linking Northey Island to the south bank of the Blackwater estuary just east of Maldon, which is considered by many to be the most likely site of the Battle of Maldon of August, 991. This was fought between an English army led by the veteran ealdorman Byrhtnoð and a professional ship-borne army of Danes. The entry for the year 991 in the 'A' manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* seems to say after a raid on Ipswich the Danes were led at Maldon by the famous Norwegian king Olaf Tryggvason, but this entry has almost certainly been confused with the events of 994. It seems more probable that the Danes at Maldon were led by their king, Sweyn Forkbeard, son of King Harold Bluetooth of Denmark (builder of the great Danish royal centre at Jelling in Jutland).

The main source of our knowledge is the Old English heroic poem about the battle, which appears to have been composed not long after the event. Its beginning and ending are lost, but the poem provides a detailed account of the battle from the English point of

view. Its pace and vividness suggests that the poem might have been intended to accompany a tapestry depicting the deeds of Byrhtnoð. According to the twelfth-century *Liber Eliensis*, Byrhtnoð's wife, Ælflæd, bequeathed such a tapestry to Ely.

The poem begins with Byrhtnoð deploying his troops along the riverbank. Across the causeway the Viking herald then calls out the Danes' demands for tribute [ll.29-41]. The river today is wider than shouting distance, but geological research has shown that in 991 it was narrower, with meadows along the banks where today there are salt-marshes

Waving his ash-shafted spear, Byrhtnoð turns the herald's words around and hurls them back at him (my translation):

Hearest thou, seafarer, what this folk sayeth?

*They will give thee spears as tribute,
deadly points, and time-tested swords,
war-gear from which thou in battle [will]
not profit.... [ll.45-48].*

Byrhtnoð's famous reply [ll.45-61] strikes what has come to be regarded as a characteristic note of English national defiance against foreign invaders, one that has sounded several times throughout our island history.

The battle would have begun then and there, but by now the rising tide made it impossible for the combatants to engage, except for those armed with bows. The poem refers to the effect of the intervening flood-tide between the two armies as *lucon lagustrea-*

mas, 'locking tidal-streams' [l.66a]. This phrase provides a strikingly succinct description of the way that the waters still close over the causeway. The incoming tide of the Blackwater estuary is separated into two tidal streams by the north eastern tip of Northey Island, which then meet again on its south-western side exactly over the causeway. As I spoke, we all witnessed the tidal streams 'locking' together over the causeway in this way.

When the tide ebbs enough to permit a crossing, the poem refers to the Vikings 'yearning for battle' [ll.72-72]. Yet still they are frustrated, for they can only advance along the narrow causeway on which Byrhtnoð has stationed a 'war-hardened warrior' named Wulfstan and two companions [ll. 74-83]. Like Horatius on the bridge, Wulfstan stoutly blocks the causeway. The tactical stalemate is then resolved through negotiations, during which the Danes are said to be guileful, which culminate in Byrhtnoð agreeing to allow the Vikings passage over the causeway *for his ofermod*, 'because of his over-confidence' [l.89b]. Armchair generals have often been critical of Byrhtnoð's decision here, but they overlook his need to bring the dangerously mobile Danish fleet-army to battle while he had the chance, rather than allowing them to continue to strike at will along the east coast.

Nevertheless, it was a fateful decision, emphasised in the poem by the dramatic advance of the Viking 'slaughter-

wolves' [l.96a] across the causeway as hungry ravens wheel overhead. Once the Danes are across, the battle begins. There is a blow-by-blow account of the fall of Byrhtnoð himself [ll.130-184], which precipitates the flight of some of the English army. The poem concludes by immortalising the heroic last stand of several named Englishmen who refuse to yield, even though all seems lost. Fighting over the body of their fallen lord, their supreme courage is realised through the words of Byrhtnoð's old comrade Byrhtwold (my translation):

Thought shall be harder, heart keener, mood shall be more [resolved], as our main [strength] lessens! [ll.312-313].

The poem concludes on so heroic a note that what is in fact a military defeat is turned into a kind of moral victory.

After the battle the Danes probably carried off Byrhtnoð's head as a battle-trophy, but his body was recovered by the monks of Ely and buried in their great abbey (**SAXON** 25). The resting place of his bones can still be seen there in Bishop West's Chapel.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that the Battle of Maldon, the first major military defeat for an English army for generations, was the beginning of the end for the line of Alfred. Further defeats ensued, including the battles of Ringmere near Thetford (see **SAXON** 25). This phase of Anglo-Danish warfare eventually culminated in the kingdom-winning victory of Sweyn's son Cnut at the battle of *Assandun* in 1016 (see **SAXON** 21 for the account of the Society's visit to the likely site of this battle).

After lunching in Maldon we ventured further down the Blackwater estuary to the remote church of St Peter at Bradwell. This venerable building is a surviving part of the original minster of *Ythanceaster* established by St Cedd during his mission to the East Saxons in the 650s. Inside its hallowed walls I recited the Old English version of Bede's account of the formidable Bishop Cedd and his relations with the East Saxon and East Anglian royal families. He certainly seems to have been active in East Anglia, for Bede adds that Cedd



Society members wade through the incoming tide as the water creeps across the causeway to Northey Island
(Photograph: R. Hoppitt)

baptised the East Saxon king Swiðhelm at the hall of the Wuffing king Æpelwald (one of Rædwald's nephews) at Rendlesham.

Cedd built his minster on the site of the Roman Saxon Shore fortress of *Othona* and in so doing can be seen to have been following the precedents set by the East Anglian pioneering missions of St Fursey at *Cnobheresburg* (see **SAXON** 19) and of St Felix at *Dommoec* (see **SAXON** 27). St Cedd's minster is the only one of which part still stands (astride the line of the west wall of the fortress) and is still in use as a place of worship.

Our visit to Bradwell was much facilitated by the kindness of the neighbouring Othona Community where we were provided with both tea and a place to park the coach.

From St Peter's at Bradwell we looked north across the estuary to Mersea Island. The church tower of St Peter's at West Mersea, another Anglo-Saxon foundation, was clearly visible and we wondered if both early churches dedicated to St Peter were originally intended to stand as paired spiritual sentinels at the entrance to the great river.

Initially we had hoped to visit Mersea Island to see West Mersea church, the museum, and its large burial mound. The latter is similar in size and age to the mounds at Bartlow (see **SAXON** 21). West Mersea mound has a brick-lined burial chamber which

contained cremated human remains dated to around the end of the first century AD. Unfortunately the large size of our party, along with the fact that the Strood, the ancient causeway linking the island to the mainland (overlooked by the mound) was covered by the high tide for much of the middle of the day, meant that we could not include the visit in our final programme.

The final visit of the day was to the area of the major centre of authority in late Iron Age Britain at Cheshunt Field, just south of Colchester. This was the original site of *Camulodunum*, and lies at the heart of a great defensive system of linear earthworks. The layout of the complex of buildings is known largely from aerial photography and little can be seen at ground level apart from the outline of two large Roman buildings, a temple enclosure and a theatre cut in the turf. This effective low profile presentation of two of the former glories of the site is supplemented by sign-boards bearing reconstruction pictures of the buildings.

Thanks to all who came for being flexible about the adjustments to the programme on the day; to Sam for his research and presentations; to Stewart for organising the logistics; and to Adrian, our coach-driver, who kept the coach wheels rolling even through the mud of Bradwell.

Society Reports

Visiting

We hosted a total of 3504 visitors this year on 183 separate tours, with an income of £10,000. August, normally our busiest month, was quieter this year with 300 fewer visitors and a similarly reduced income. This was however offset by the pre-season booked tours which brought in more than £800.

As usual we had a variety of booked parties: ten school groups, including ones from as far away as Colombia, Germany, Switzerland and Belgium; at least twenty overseas countries were represented by other groups, including the interestingly-named 'Society for Creative Anachronism' from the USA.

Membership

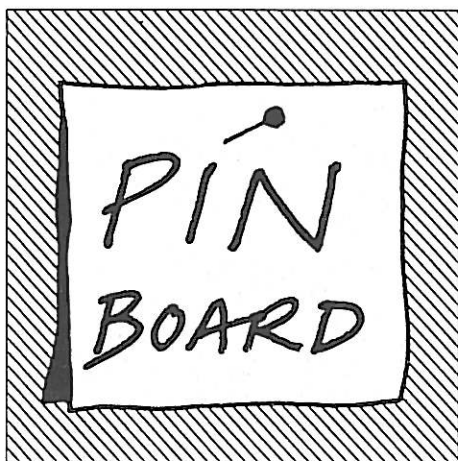
Membership continues to be buoyant, and we currently have a grand total of 329, comprising 185 Ordinary members, 93 Life members, 24 Family members, 19 Overseas members and 8 Student members.

A reminder that your membership renewal is enclosed with this copy of **SAXON**.

Web-Site

The web-site is well used and well visited. There have been over 95,000 hits to the end of the year since we established the site in 1997. There has been a significant increase in usage since the start of September 1999, with over

1000 hits on each of seven days. The UK, Australia and the USA continue to be the main source of 'visitors'. We have received over 50 enquiries this year for information about visiting the site, and from students studying Sutton Hoo and the Anglo-Saxons at all academic levels, many of them in the USA. We have added some new material, notably our 'Annual Report', and a new link to the Roskilde Ship Museum web-site which has a section on the Sutton Hoo ship. We are currently in the process of expanding the information on the 'virtual tour' which hopefully will make the site more useful to 'visiting' students.



DIARY

SUTTON HOO SOCIETY AGM

The **Annual General Meeting** will be held on **Friday 25 February 2000** in the Sixth Form Centre at **Woodbridge School, Burkitt Road, Woodbridge at 7.30 pm** (see location map).

Agenda

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

Please send Committee nominations in advance to: The Hon. Secretary, Flat 2, Old Rectory Court, Melton, Woodbridge IP12 1NL.

The business meeting will be followed by a presentation by **Chris Hudson** of **Chris Hudson Associates**, designer of The National Trust's new exhibition at Sutton Hoo. This will be an opportunity for members to hear something of the philosophy behind the new exhibition, and to preview some of the features and details of the display.

SPRING LECTURE

The Spring Lecture will take place on **Wednesday 22 March 2000 at 7.30 pm in St John's Hall, Woodbridge**. **Jo Caruth**, of the Suffolk County Archaeological Unit will present results from the excavations of the **Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Lakenheath** in

NW Suffolk. The excavation was notable for the discovery of a horse burial, which provides important parallels for the horse and bridle found at Sutton Hoo.

2000 SEASON

The Sutton Hoo site will open on **Saturday 22 April** (Easter Saturday) and will continue to be open on weekend and Bank Holiday Monday afternoons until **Sunday 29 October 2000**. Guided tours will begin at 2 pm and 3 pm. Entrance charges remain at £2 for adults and £1 for under 18s, children under 10 are free and Sutton Hoo Society members are also free on production of their current membership card. Booked tours for organised parties can be made, by arrangement, for any reasonable time throughout the year by contacting the Visits and Guiding Secretary (address below).

CONFERENCE

Plans are currently under way for our second conference in **Autumn 2000**. In response to feedback from the last conference, this one will have a maritime theme. Details will be in **SAXON 32** and at www.suttonhoo.org

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NEW PRESIDENT

It is six years since the Duke of Grafton took on the role of Society President, and so he has now completed his term of office. We would like to convey our thanks to him for his interest in the Society over the past six years and hope that he has enjoyed his association with us over what has been a dynamic period in the development of Sutton Hoo.

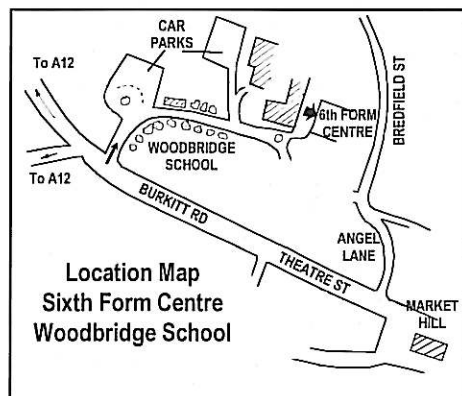
We are delighted to announce that **The Earl of Cranbrook** has agreed to take on the role of President to replace the Duke of Grafton. Lord Cranbrook has a distinguished record as an environmental biologist and zoo-archaeologist working in South East Asia, the UK and Europe. Following a first degree at Cambridge, he gained his PhD from the University of Birmingham, and holds Honorary degrees of DSc from the University of Aberdeen and Cranfield. He has strong rural and

country-side connections through the family farming business in Suffolk, and in his work in national and local public service and voluntary organisations. These include being a former Trustee of the Natural History Museum, London; immediate past chairman of English Nature, retired founder member of the UK Round Table on Sustainable Development, and three times chairman of the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Affairs sub-committee of the House of Lords Select Committee on European Affairs. Lord Cranbrook continues to have an active role in national environmental regulation. Locally he is Chairman of the Long Shop (Museum) Project Trust in Leiston, Suffolk; President of the Suffolk Wildlife Trust; Patron of the Suffolk Naturalists Society and Deputy Lieutenant of the County. He is also a past chairman of the Suffolk Coastal Museums and Allied Interests Group. We very much look forward to our future association.

GUIDES

We always need more helpers and guides to welcome visitors to the site at Sutton Hoo. You do not have to be an Anglo-Saxon expert, but simply able to present the Sutton Hoo story to our wide variety of visitors so that they leave having enjoyed the experience of learning more about this fascinating place.

If you are interested in helping in any way, either guiding or selling tickets, books, post-cards etc. in the ticket hut, please contact Stewart Salmond (address below). We would also welcome any teachers who might be interested in taking school parties round the site.



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Who's Who — Sutton Hoo Society Committee Members

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