



The Newsletter of the Sutton Hoo Society

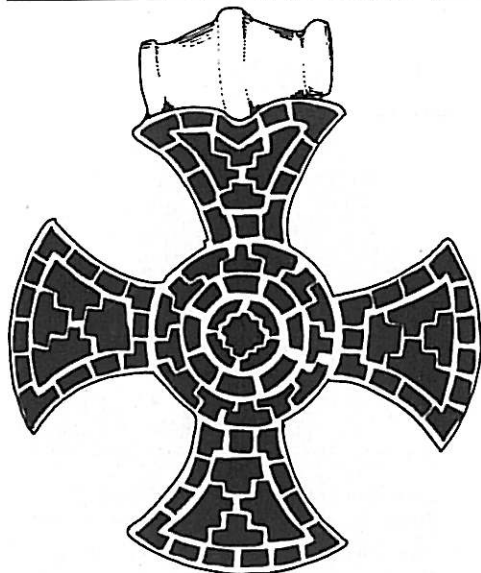
SAXON

President: The Earl of Cranbrook

No.38 / 2003

SUTTON HOO SOCIETY CONFERENCE 2002

Third Sutton Hoo Society Conference - another sell out



Above: The Conference emblem, The Ixworth Cross. Gold and garnet cross from Stanton, Ixworth, Suffolk.

On 12 October, 250 delegates from across the country attended the 2002 Conference hosted by the Sutton Hoo Society at Suffolk Constabulary HQ, Martlesham Heath near Ipswich. The theme *Changing Beliefs – Aspects of Conversion in the Early Medieval Period* looked at England in the sixth and seventh centuries during the period of change from pre-Christian beliefs towards Christianity. The Conference aimed to shed light on how that change might have taken place, the role of kings such as the East Anglian King Raedwald, the impact on the landscape, the economy and the common man.

The panel of speakers: historian Professor James Campbell from Worcester College, Oxford; landscape historian Dr

Della Hooke late of Birmingham University; manuscript expert Dr Michelle Brown from the British Library; topographical historian Dr Graham Jones of Leicester University; archaeologist Dr Tim Pestell of Norwich Castle Museum and Anglo-Saxon literature scholar Dr Sam Newton of Wuffing Education.

Co-Chairmen for the day were Professor Martin Carver, Professor of Archaeology, University of York and Angela Care Evans, curator of the Early Anglo-Saxon Collections at the British Museum. Both skilfully steered speakers and delegates through a fascinating day of debate and discussion. In his closing remarks Professor Carver re-asserted that the Anglo-Saxons were as culturally and politically sophisticated as ourselves.



Above: Professor Martin Carver executing his duties as Joint Chairman

Photograph: Cliff Hoppitt



Above: Sutton Hoo Society President the Earl of Cranbrook giving the final address

Photograph: Cliff Hoppitt

BELIEF IN THE SEVENTH - CENTURY

by James Campbell

Any attempt to deduce beliefs from physical remains must be attended by agnosticism. This is illustrated by the way in which the Sutton Hoo complex has been interpreted almost as the last fling of a defiant paganism; while an alternative contention that it is expressive of a fairly long period of pagan/Christian accommodation is put forward with equal force.

Any attempt to consider the religious history of seventh-century England has to face the Bedam problems. On the one hand, without Bede we should know very very little. On the other, Bede was as devout as he was learned; he wrote for a cause and he wrote with great skill. Deftly, he blanks out that which he feels it inappropriate for his readers to know.

Obviously, to understand belief in the seventh century we need to understand its paganism. Bede, deliberately, tells us little of this. The little he does tell us is of essential importance.

First, there is his account of the attempt made to convert Northumbria c.627. He tells us that the chief priest, Coifi, renounced paganism. He mounted a stallion (pagan priests being forbidden to ride such); took spear and sword (priests were required to be unarmed); and desecrated a pagan temple by casting the spear into it.

This incident is indeed informative. It tells of a pagan priestly hierarchy governed by particular rules; and of temples, again with rules. The only other place in which Bede tells something of paganism is in his book on the measurement of time. Here, for example,

we learn that 'Easter' was the name of a pagan feast. Most important is what he tells about the pagan calendar. It was elaborate and sophisticated, organized to reconcile lunar and solar measurement by the intercalation of a leap month at intervals. Calendrical control is nearly always the province of priesthoods. So, this Bedam passage gives a broad hint of the status of the pagan priesthood, or priesthoods.

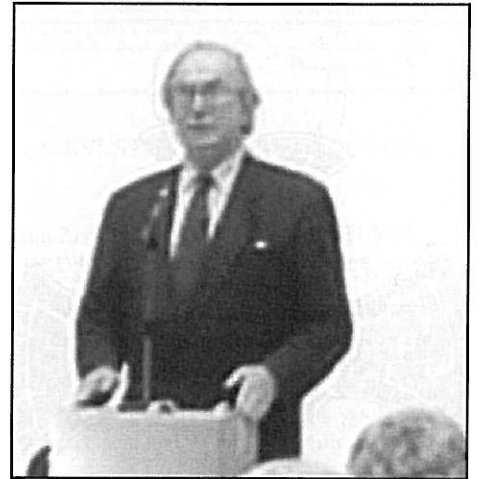
But consider what he does not tell us. Major questions which arise are these. What happened to the pagan priesthoods? Could some of them have become Christian priests? Were temples endowed? If so, was the conversion, seen from another angle the Dissolution of the Temples with economic consequences?

Could we learn something about seventh - century paganism by studying Germanic religion in centuries much earlier and much later? Here a cautious chorus breaks into morning song. How can Tacitus, writing in c.100; how can Snorri writing in the thirteenth century tell us anything credible about the days of Coifi and Raedwald? Well, at least they can give cause for thought. One example of the four seventh - century Anglo-Saxon law codes is that the two later are distinguished from the two earlier by the earlier containing no references to the infliction of physical penalties while the later have many. Tacitus says that in Germany the infliction of physical penalties was a priestly function. Did, maybe, the conversion bring about a major change in the organisation of justice?

A last observation. In noting the extent to which the pagan and the Christian converged we should not forget the extent to which Christianity can transform people and peoples and we may see the strange career of Sigebert, King of the East Angles, as conceivably typical of many lesser lives.

Below: Professor James Campbell

Photograph: Cliff Hoppitt



Prof. James Campbell is Professor of medieval history in the University of Oxford. He is the editor and part author of a general account of the Anglo-Saxon period and has published various relevant papers, including one on Sutton Hoo.

PRE-CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS SITES AND CHRISTIANITY

by Della Hooke

While Sutton Hoo may represent the reassertion of faith by the East Anglian kings in their pagan inheritance, there are other indications of pre-Christian belief surviving in early medieval England. Many pagan shrines may have been destroyed or Christianised (like some of those located within or close to the Cotswolds hillforts) but worship at trees, stones and wells continued among the general populace; repeated edicts from the Church throughout the early medieval period show how such practises continually had to be forbidden.

The symbolism of stones was adopted into Christianity by the erection of memorial stones in western Britain and by stone crosses, especially in Northern England; springs and wells, associated with purity and healing, were to become associated with Christian saints; wooden pillars, probably representing trees, had been erected at places of assembly and worship such as Yeavinger in northern England or Eamhain Mhacha in Ireland but



Above: Dr Della Hooke

Photograph: Cliff Hoppitt

living trees had continued to play a part in the beliefs and wishes of the people. Now the living tree, or its representative the hewn pillar, was to be replaced by the dead tree in the form of the cross – now to be the ‘tree of glory’, ‘the noble tree’, ‘tree of victory’ etc – and crosses were erected beside monasteries or carried into battle. Only one reference in a charter boundary clause survives to an ash-tree in Somerset ‘which the ignorant call holy’, although a few other ‘holy oaks’ also occur. The yew continued to be accepted within Christian churchyards, probably because it had long been a symbol of death and regeneration; several in the Welsh Borderland have been found in association with Romano-British burial but several churchyard yews appear to be even older than this and probably marked an area deemed to be sacred at a very early date. The oak and

the ash had both played a major role in pre-Christian religion, a role to be continued in their mythological associations, although the elder was to remain closely associated with witchcraft.

While the role of such natural symbols appears to have survived most strongly in western Britain, several place-names referring to pagan gods, temples or burials are more prominent in midland and eastern England – the main areas of pagan Anglo-Saxon settlement. The term *hlaw*, for a tumulus, has often been associated with Anglo-Saxon burial and *hearg* and *weoh* are terms which appear to refer to a heathen shrine. Associations with Anglo-Saxon gods are also most frequent in these regions: among them references to Woden, Tiw and Thunor. Around the southern parts of East Anglia, in particular, a concentration of names referring

to Thunor are found, a god who, ironically, has been depicted as the slayer of the World Serpent which itself represented Evil but in many early religions had been closely linked to the renewal of life.

Dr Della Hooke was Research Fellow in historical geography in the School of Geography, University of Birmingham, and later Senior Lecturer in Geography at Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education (now the University of Gloucestershire). She now works as a consultant in Archaeology and Historical Landscapes

KING RÆDWALD AND THE TEMPLE OF THE TWO ALTARS

by Sam Newton

Rædwald seems to stand at the threshold of the Age of Christianity in England. Our knowledge of him is dependent on Bede’s early eighth - century *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Bede writes so well that it is easy to forget that his is a selective, Roman Christian and Northumbrian English view of history. This has determined what he says – and excludes – about the belief systems of other peoples. For example, he omits all reference to the pioneer of Benedictine monasticism in England, St Botulf, about whom he must have known. We must thus read Bede’s text very carefully indeed.

Rædwald is portrayed as a king peripheral to Bede’s main concerns. Yet if we unravel his narrative and place the events to which he refers within a chronological framework, Rædwald can be seen to have played a more vital part in advancing the Christian cause in England than Bede acknowledges.

It was in Kent around the year 604 that the Wuffing king was baptised under the auspices of Æthelbert of Kent, overlord of south-eastern Britain at that time. On his return home Rædwald established an altar to his new god alongside one to his old gods. Bede deploys biblical rhetoric to condemn Rædwald for what appears from his retrospective ideologically hard-line position to be an unacceptable compromise. If we separate Bede’s early eighth - century rhetoric from the witnessed seventh - century fact of the temple of two altars, the latter can be seen more as an attempt by Rædwald to resolve a synthesis of the old and new faiths.

Following the death of Æthelbert of Kent about the year 616 and the consequent crisis of Christianity, Rædwald’s appears to have been the only royal Christian altar still functioning in England. Rædwald himself was now overlord of the south and not long

after was at war over a matter of honour with the overlord of the north, Æthelfrith. This was settled by Rædwald’s victory at the Battle of the River Idle, which gave the Wuffing king overlordship of all England. As this appears to have been the first successful battle-test for a baptised English king, it may have been seen to demonstrate the power of the new god to deliver the blessings of victory. If so, this might have been a significant factor in the re-establishment of Christianity in England.

By this reckoning, Rædwald is one of the central figures in the coming of Christianity to the English. For a fuller account, see my new book, *The Reckoning of King Rædwald*, now available at local bookshops or via my website www.wuffings.co.uk.



Left: Dr Sam Newton
Photograph: Cliff Hoppitt

Dr Sam Newton was awarded his Ph.D. for research into Beowulf in 1991 and is author of The Origins of Beowulf and The pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia, published in 1993, now in its third print run. He is currently a freelance tutor and researcher in Early Medieval and Wuffing Studies.

TRADING PLACES OR SETTLING DOWN? DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LANDSCAPE OF MIDDLE ANGLO-SAXON EAST ANGLIA

by Tim Pestell

Archaeological research is demonstrating an increasing variety of settlement types in Middle Anglo-Saxon East Anglia. With that realisation, scholars have created a number of models to understand these differences. For the seventh and eighth - centuries, reconstructing the organisation of settlements within the landscape is problematical but appears to see small land units held together to form larger estates. They were owned, worked economically and administered as one, and might also have acted as judicial and religious foci. Over time these 'multiple estates' fragmented, coming to form smaller land blocks, notably the parishes that we know today.

We can play the 'reconstruct an estate' game for many places in Norfolk and Suffolk, but the key point is that these multiple estates appear fundamentally similar to Anglo-Saxon *parochiae*, or the land units attached to ancient minster churches. A minster was a central church serving a wide surrounding area, its *parochiae*, staffed by a community of priests. Subsequently, dependant chapelries were created for the ease of those living at some remove from the centre, although dues were still paid to the minster. Over time, land fragmentation led to the parish church system we know today. Charter evidence shows that minsters were often wealthy institutions with sizeable landholdings. However, we also know that in the seventh and eighth - centuries there were extensive royal lands, again likely to have been organised as 'multiple estates'. The definition of whether an estate is 'secular' or 'ecclesiastical' is therefore difficult, particularly for an area like East Anglia which has almost no pre Conquest charter evidence.

Another settlement type, the so-called 'productive site' is less easy to define and the term has been criticised by some archaeologists. It was first used by numismatists in the 1980s to describe sites identified by metal-detectorists that were yielding unusually high quantities of coinage and other metalwork. The number of coins

can be exceptionally high. Many parishes in Norfolk and Suffolk have undergone repeated metal-detection and have tended to yield on average 2 or 3 sceatta coins each. By contrast, one single site within Bawsey in Norfolk has yielded over 100 coins. Such 'productive' sites are therefore of prime importance in understanding wider Early Medieval economic networks and the organisation and control of the landscape. Paradoxically, most 'productive' sites are still very poorly understood archaeologically and await even basic fieldwalking.

While the definition of a class of site only in terms of an unusual metalwork assemblage may be criticised, identifying 'productive' sites is useful. Were such places simply estate centres, and if so, can they be identified as of secular or religious character? Or were they more specific trading sites, like the *wics* at *Hamwic* (Southampton) and Ipswich?

The interpretation of settlement sites remains problematical. We know from charter evidence that the Church was heavily involved in trade and became wealthy as a result. At the same time, some sites previously viewed as royal palaces, for instance Northampton and Cheddar, have recently been re-interpreted as minsters. There has also been a debate over the exact nature of minster communities, some seeing a distinction between those that were true 'monasteries', with life led according to a strict religious Rule, and other less rigorous communities more integrated with the local populace. Into this confusion, the material culture from excavated high-status sites like Brandon in Suffolk is often equivocal in supporting a religious interpretation. Indeed, even the notion that minster communities were inherently stable institutions is now being questioned. At Flixborough in Humberside, for instance, the excavation of high - status settlement has suggested that there was a series of changes in the nature of the site during its history. The historical record also suggests estates could fluctuate

between secular and religious ownership. In the early tenth - century, Archbishop Dunstan's hagiographer describes Glastonbury as a 'royal island', raising the question of whether this was a proprietary church in the early tenth century, and of what the distinction was between royal and abbatial lands.

Given these difficulties, it is tricky to identify the role the Church might have had in the development of the settlement hierarchy in the seventh and eighth - centuries. The economic wealth of East Anglia and beyond at this time is quite clear from the exceptional quantities of coinage being recovered from certain sites. Equally, the conflict generated among those attempting to control this wealth is evident from the internecine warfare between the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms recounted by Bede and in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. This makes it perfectly logical to suggest that the East Anglian royal family was as likely to exert control over sites like Bawsey as Ipswich. What, then, was the role of the Church in control of the landscape?

The Church has, characteristically, been accorded great importance principally because we can see elements of it more easily, notably through documentary records. Certainly, the Church may have helped to develop the administrative capacity to run estates and process taxation or renders, but this does not mean that any centre of importance should be labelled a minster. It would be unsurprising to find such effective land organisation mechanisms rapidly being developed by increasingly powerful ruling elites. The 'productive' site phenomenon adds another layer to this by showing that even with a widespread system of 'multiple estates', some parts of East Anglia were visibly wealthier than others. This seems to reflect precisely those wider economic forces that rulers sought to control. Demonstrating this power was duly manifested in increasingly wealthy and status-orientated burials like Snape and Sutton Hoo, and on the eve of Conversion, at Boss Hall and Harford Farm. The Church, and the patronage of minsters, subsequently provided a new way for elites to express their wealth and articulate an ideology binding together and controlling their subjects. Ultimately, however, it was these new aristocracies not the Church that gave direction and order to the great estates in the age of Conversion.



Left: The Panel, (left to right) Angela Care Evans, Graham Jones, Tim Pestell, Sam Newton, Michelle Brown, Della Hooke. Photograph: Cliff Hoppitt

Dr Tim Pestell is Assistant Keeper of Archaeology for Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service. He is the joint author of the recent excavation report on the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Snape, Suffolk, (Snape):- No. 95 in the *East Anglian Archaeology* series.

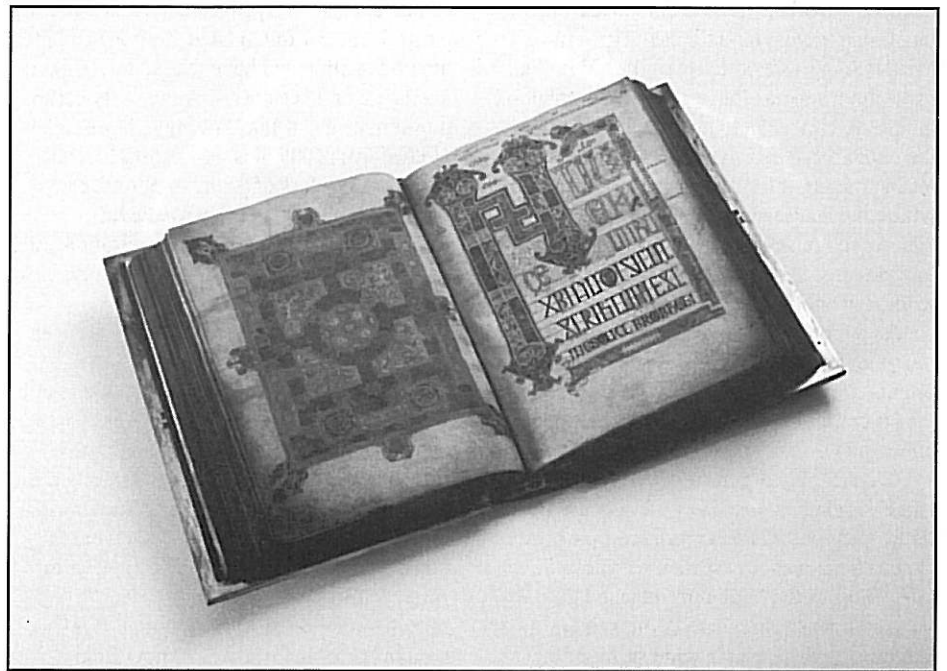
FROM DARKNESS INTO LIGHT? EARLY ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS, A STUDY IN CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

by Michelle P. Brown

The pagan Germanic and Celtic peoples were adept at reading sign and symbol. Although they possessed proto-literate writing systems – runes and ogam – born of early contact with Rome, these were only used for short commemorative and talismanic inscriptions.

Full literacy had been introduced to Britain under the Roman Empire and survived its demise in British enclaves such as Wales and Cornwall. However, it was the conversion to Christianity which brought the book to the English peoples. What more natural than that those who had for centuries signalled status, power and authority by the appearance – their metalwork and dress – should apply their styles to the new ultimate authority of the word of God? Out of such a meeting of worlds was born the illuminated manuscript.

Only in northern Europe could volumes such as the Lindisfarne Gospels, the Book of Durrow and the Book of Kells have been conceived. They are encyclopaedic in their visual references to the art of antiquity, of the various Celtic, British and Germanic peoples of Britain and Ireland and of their contacts in the wider world, from Gaul, Scandinavia, Rome and Byzantium to Palestine and Coptic Egypt. As with the incredible multi-cultural assembly of artefacts in the Sutton Hoo burials, the maker of the Lindisfarne Gospels was proclaiming Anglo-Saxon England the heir of Rome, and of the other cultures of the past, whilst asserting a new identity on the world stage. In this respect it is the visual equivalent of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People. The softly, softly approach advocated by Pope Gregory the Great to Augustine when asked for advice on how to treat pagan sanctuaries (his reply being, if there's a party going on, join in; if there's a place hallowed by tradition, make it Christ's own) bore fruit. Christianity exerted a profound effect on Anglo-Saxon society. At



its most extreme it could lead seasoned warriors to embrace pacifism and kings to free slaves. It also provided a structure for government, producing written lawcodes, property documents and genealogies legitimising dynasties. It did not reject the past though. Monasteries became repositories of group memory – that great epic *Beowulf* was, after all, written down in the cloister.

Other achievements included the recording of the English language. Unlike their later medieval counterparts, Wycliffe and Tyndale, Anglo-Saxons such as Bede and Aldred (the tenth-century translator of the Lindisfarne Gospels) were not persecuted for translating sacred text into their native tongue – the Celts and English used whatever means they could to get the 'Good News' (God Spell) out there, making English one of the very first written western vernacular languages. Our

knowledge of the early Middle Ages, and the impact of Anglo-Saxon society and culture, would have been much less without the book.

'The Painted Labyrinth: The World of the Lindisfarne Gospels' runs from 16 May – 28 September 2003 at the British Library, 96 Euston Rd, London NW1 2DB. A new video and two new publications will be available: Michelle P. Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society, Spirituality and the Scribe* (London and Toronto, 2003), £19.95 Michelle P. Brown, *The Painted Labyrinth: The World of the Lindisfarne Gospels* (London, 2003), £5.95



Above left: Incipit page introducing *St Jerome's letter to Pope Damascus*
Lower left: *St Matthew Opening of the Christmas Gospel* Above:
Two pages, *Lindisfarne Gospel*
All photographs British Library

Dr Michelle Brown is the Curator of Illuminated Manuscripts at the British Library. She has published and lectured extensively on the book culture of the Middle Ages (and of the Celts and Anglo-Saxons in particular), on the history of writing systems and on the use of imagery in art and society.



FROM DARKNESS INTO THE ANGLO-SAXONS

by Anna Gannon



Left: Silver penny of Series K probably minted in Kent, about the second quarter of the 8th century. The attributes that accompany the busts (in this case an elegant palm cup) serve to transmit messages. The cup would have been a reminder of feasting in Hall, but also of the Eucharistic chalice.

If one looks at descriptions of artefacts in archaeological reports and catalogues — even fairly recent ones, alas — one finds words such as ‘rude’ and ‘crude’ commonly used to describe ‘barbaric’ art. These words make us flinch: nowadays we are certainly aware of the need to be politically correct at all costs, and we do not like using such words, but it is also true that our attitude to these things has changed. Indeed for most of us the art of the Dark Ages (another prejudiced term) is utterly compelling. It is probably thanks in part to our familiarity with contemporary and particularly non-western art and ‘different ways of seeing’ that we are now more tolerant and receptive to things ‘non-classical’. However, it is my contention that it is thanks to recent scholarship and archaeological search for the wider context and social models, work that takes us closer to the people that made these things, that our attitude has become more open. As we begin to understand the Anglo-Saxons in more depth we find the effort required to go beyond the impression of ‘tacky glitter’ and *horror vacui* worth our while.

Much learned recent academic work in fact goes far beyond the mere classification of the material and strives to ask many other questions of the objects studied in order to provide us with a broader picture — this is true for the interpretation of material assemblages as disparate as bracteates, imported goods and so on. Indeed, once we see things as integral

to the society that produced them, and take a more careful look, we learn from what the objects themselves can tell us. One could argue that it is the intricate decoration displayed on the artefact itself that alerts us to the fact that the objects are trying to tell us something, and inviting us to ask more questions about the packed meaning they convey.

For the Anglo-Saxon material we are sometimes in the fortunate position of being able to pursue such questions and of considering art and its meaning in a social context with the support of written material. One of the exciting things about the Sutton Hoo discovery was the resonant relationship that some of the artefacts found in certain descriptions in *Beowulf*. These are by now so well known that I shall simply refer you to the eloquent words of Seamus Heaney’s address at the Official Opening of the Sutton Hoo Visitors’ Centre, which express our common sense of wonder so beautifully (see *Saxon* no. 37/2003). Besides *Beowulf*’s poetic vision, another text which is crucial for our proper understanding of Sutton Hoo is Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*. The description of Rædwald’s wavering in his religious allegiances which so scandalises Bede (in Book II, chapter 15), whether or not Rædwald is indeed the man buried at Sutton Hoo, does describe the spirit of the age, the mingling, not yet the homogenisation, of two different cultural strands, and Anglo-Saxon England at

the crossroads. It is the very language of the artefacts that tells us of the complexity of the situation of the time and that answers question of why such particular choices were made, and what message they would have conveyed. The success of the desired effect in the subtle interaction between wearer/onlooker is something that must be taken into account: ‘art for art’s sake’ is a remote concept in a world where affiliation is proclaimed visually.

We can categorically state that artefacts are bearers of meaning, although, it must be admitted, that often we cannot read all the intended messages in the actual decorations of many artefacts, especially early ones, simply for lack of *comparanda*, we are in a better position after the advent of Christianity, particularly after the introduction of written records. During the process of Christianisation we can certainly perceive a decisive change in the style of prestige artefacts. The trend is towards finer, lighter jewellery, akin to that worn in Rome and Byzantium, and the overall pattern that emerges, the blurring of differences between cultural provinces hint to the total change of pace brought about by Christianity (see *Saxon* no. 36/2002). We also notice novel interactions between old and new as a way of resolving tensions: pectoral crosses, as well as jewels that include coins, are good examples of this.

With the Church becoming such a major force, and, as we know from Bede, being ‘manned’ by the same social elite that had

commissioned fine jewels before, it is not surprising that taste and craftsmanship should overlap with striking results in the new prestige objects commissioned, for instance, on the vellum pages of manuscripts. But the 'vocabulary' does evolve: thanks to the pursuit of Christianity and *romanitas* we see new directions and expressions expanding this traditional language of Germanic art by means of Mediterranean imports which so caught the imagination of early travellers to Rome.

If Christianity brought a new set of stories to tell, the way of teaching through images, addressing a culture receptive to this mode of communication, remains fundamentally the same as in the Pagan past. Contemporary references seem to suggest that the various artefacts used in a church would have been similar across a variety of media (gospel books, sacred vessels, sculpture and carvings, textiles – and coins, I would argue), reinforcing their impression and the message conveyed – probably the same would have been true in any self-respecting Great Hall... Stone sculpture, with its relatively higher survival rate than metalwork, offers interesting material for research, particularly amongst the stately High Crosses. Dense and packed with meaning, their didactic programme appears to have worked at different levels of sophistication, as some of their theological allusions are very complex. These different levels of understanding may well have been present even in the earlier Germanic tradition, as some ambiguity in representation seems to suggest, but of course this cannot be tested. It is when we get confirmation from written sources, such as exegetical writings or the famous 'riddles', that we find ourselves with the key for the proper understanding of these layers of meaning.

Coins, particularly the so-called silver *sceattas* of the first half of the seventh – century are also great sources for our better knowledge of the period, as they survive in great number to testify to much that has been lost through time, greed or recycling. They provide us with a wealth of supporting images, from the relatively simple illustrations of birds in the vine, to iconic images of the she-wolf and twins, from meditations on the significance of the Cross, to the spread of the Good News to the four corners of the earth. It is interesting to note how much the images were still using 'animal art', though in a different, classical idiom, in order to convey emphatically Christian messages. Their thematic complexity testifies to the tremendous intellectual vigour of the time: there is no doubt to my mind that the Anglo-Saxons were indeed the bearers of the torch of civilisation at the time – a fact all of us in the West ought to be grateful for.

At the inception of Christianity the Church relied on the good will of kings to continue its missionary activities; later it was kings that sought support through the Church. Coins had been used since Antiquity as means of political propaganda: perhaps we see some jostling for position by means of style and legends on some of the coins, particularly in East Anglia, where the battle is between the runic series R and the pictorial Series Q. We cannot but guess at the political power struggles of the time, and it is equally left to our imagination to consider how the artefacts discussed (manuscripts, sculpture, metalwork, even coins) would have been used and displayed in order to achieve the highest possible dramatic impact on the audience. But was it really any different at the time of Beowulf? We begin where we started, in the Great feasting Hall...

Anna Gannon received her doctorate from the University of Cambridge for work on the iconography of Anglo-Saxon coinage. She has been working in the coin departments at the Fitzwilliam Museum and the British Museum, and has put on an exhibition on Anglo-Saxon coins for the Ashmolean Museum. Her book on Anglo-Saxon coinage was published by Oxford University Press in Spring 2003.



Left: Silver penny (a so-called sceat) of Series K probably minted in Kent, about the second quarter of the 8th century. The figure holds a cross, reminding us of the importance of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon society.

The Intertidal Survey of the River Deben below Sutton Hoo

by Linzi Everett

The Intertidal Survey of the River Deben below Sutton Hoo

From the Sutton Hoo Society Chairman:

In the Autumn of 2002 the Sutton Hoo Society executive committee discussed in depth the request to fund this project. It was unanimously agreed that on account of our close association with the area under investigation, almost directly under the gaze of the royal burial ground, the survey would be of particular interest and a wholly appropriate and worthwhile exercise for society funding. It was agreed to offer £5648 in two staged payments. The first payment was made in February 2003 and the final payment will be made in the near future.

We are thrilled at the C14 results and offer our congratulations to Tom Loader and Linzi Everett and the survey team for their work, especially in such difficult terrain. (The next phase of the project, completion of an archive report and possible further monitoring of the



Right: The scar across the mud in the top right hand corner was caused by a boat keel and lies less than a metre from the wattle in the centre of the picture

Photograph: Suffolk County Council

Between November 2002 and April 2003, Duncan Allan, Linzi Everett and Clare McLannahan, archaeologists from the Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service (SCCAS), undertook an intermittent programme of monitoring and fieldwalking on a stretch of foreshore fronting the Sutton Hoo estate. This followed the discovery of a spread of artefacts and man-made wooden structures on the mudflats during a much larger English Heritage funded field survey of the intertidal zone of the Suffolk coast and estuaries.

The initial English Heritage survey was carried out between May 2002 and March 2003. The field survey element of the project comprised a rapid ground-based survey, walking salt-marsh and estuarine shorelines of the rivers Blyth, Alde, Ore, Butley, Deben, Orwell and the north bank of the Stour, looking for and recording any features, structures and finds present in mudflats, salt-marsh and eroded land surfaces. Suffolk's intertidal zone has not previously been subjected to systematic archaeological survey. This environment is dynamic by nature and can be subject to dramatic changes through continuous deposition and erosion of sediments. As such, any archaeology present has been constantly under threat of loss without record; never more so than today as sea level rises are coupled with the threat of greater extremes in our weather patterns, brought about by global warming. This has undoubtedly put more pressure on our coastal defences and increased the erosion and

movements of sediments within our river estuaries. Rivers have, through time, provided communities with a valuable resource, and a focus for a wide range of activities. It seems hard to believe that evidence of such activity survives in such a dynamic and changeable environment, but where the right conditions exist this can also be conducive to excellent preservation of archaeological deposits, including organic material.

Surveying the intertidal zone of the River Deben turned out to be tricky and often fruitless, owing to the soft, unstable mudflats, most likely the result of recent silt deposition and to the vast stretches of heavily creeked saltmarsh which line much of the river. However, one area to the north of Little Haugh, below Sutton Hoo, comprised a foreshore solid enough for a survey team to traverse confidently. It was in this area that two small and fragmentary patches of what appeared to be wattle-work lay exposed on the mud. Alongside one of these patches were two sherds of coarse quartz/mica tempered Early Saxon pottery, and although the proximity of the wood and the pottery tempted association between the two, there was no stratigraphic evidence to prove a link. Sherds of both Roman and medieval pottery were also recovered from around the high tide line, as was an impressive, if slightly corroded, Late Bronze Age socketed axehead. Wattle-work in a waterlogged context rings alarm bells for any archaeologist, immediately conjuring up images of Bronze Age trackways, as recently discovered in the Blackwater Estuary (Essex),

or the remnants of fish traps of medieval or even Anglo-Saxon date. At this stage, we did not have enough evidence for any confident interpretation of what, or how old, these remnant features might be. Clearly there was a need for further investigation, not least because of the sites proximity to Sutton Hoo.

While there was abundant evidence showing up for the historic use of the river, casual visits to record structures give no indication of how threatened they are likely to be. Are they currently eroding? Would such erosion expose a greater area of wattle structures for recording or merely break up what had already been revealed? Our survey was soon to suggest that boats grounding on the beach may be far more threatening to remnant structures than any short-term threat from estuarine erosion.

The Sutton Hoo foreshore posed the team a number of questions which could not be answered without further work, something which was made possible thanks to a grant from the Sutton Hoo Society. A 4-part programme of works was devised to better understand the site.

Fieldwalking: a 20m grid was established on the foreshore to be systematically searched and on which to plot locations of any finds or new wooden structures observed. The grid was also subject to a metal detector survey, the artefacts from which were identified by Sue Anderson, Finds Manager for SCCAS.

Monitoring: recording of exposed wooden structures and monthly comparison to note any changes. The grid pegs were also

designed with means to measure the level of erosion/accretion of the river bank in order to build up a general picture of the tidal processes at work on this stretch of foreshore, processes which will in turn determine the stability and survival of the archaeological deposits exposed.

Planning: a Total Station Theodolite was used to set out the grid, accurately locate the wooden structures and record the edge of the actively eroding land surface fronting the foreshore.

Paleoenvironmental analysis: study of the estuarine deposits by Peter Murphy and Mike Godwin in order to recreate a picture of the environmental setting in which the wooden structures had been created. Four samples were also taken for radiocarbon dating, two from sediments and two wood samples from wattle areas.

Fieldwalking and monitoring were carried out monthly at suitable low tides. The eroding edge of the saltmarsh was planned three times over the six months to assess the rate of erosion along the high tide line. These actions quickly showed two things about the site. First, despite quite large fragments of eroded saltmarsh littering the beach, the river bank is not currently suffering rapid erosion, although the river bank will always be subject to scour during abnormal storm tides. Secondly, the artefacts recovered from the grid (Roman and medieval pottery, worked and burnt flints) were mostly located within 1m of the river bank, suggesting they were falling from the land surface rather than eroding out of a foreshore deposit. Metal detecting produced a wealth of modern boat related material, of which only two small lumps of metal slag extracted from the bank section were of any archaeological significance.

By far the most exciting results came from the environmental work. Twenty sediment samples were collected from two small sections, and studied to build up a picture of the development of the estuarine environment. The lowest deposit of the sequence showed that the channel had once been freshwater, only starting to become brackish by around 570 BC +/- 50, thanks to radiocarbon dating. A second radiocarbon date of 0 AD +/- 50 came from a sample just below the present foreshore.

The analysis of samples taken from directly beneath the wattle suggested that the wooden structures were constructed in a similar environment to that seen today, with an underlying sand ridge allowing access onto a fairly firm foreshore. One important difference lay in the fact that the saltmarsh then was less extensive than it is now and thus the foreshore was wider and able to hold more water at high tide — altogether, an ideal setting for a fish trap on the low water line.

While analysis of the sediment sequence had produced interesting results for changes to the local environment during the prehistoric period, the most exciting results were to come from the wattle structures. Two wood samples



Above: Close-up of the wattle panel lying on the low water line. This was dated to 590 AD, +/- 50 years

Photograph: Suffolk County Council

had been taken and subsequently prepared for radiocarbon dating by wood anatomist Rowena Gale, before being sent on to the Scottish Universities Research and Reactor Centre. That we might have a contemporary link between activity on the site at Sutton Hoo and on the Deben foreshore seemed a little too much to hope for. As such, the results were something of a shock — alder from a wood scatter near the high tide line came back dated to 420 AD +/- 50 and a hazel pole from wattle on the low tide line was dated 590 AD +/- 50. Whilst the earlier date may just be very late Roman, we now have secure evidence of Anglo-Saxon activity on the river below Sutton Hoo.

Our site on the foreshore of the River Deben lies some 400 metres upstream from the most obvious access point from the river to the Royal cemetery, but the discovery of a cemetery under the car park of the visitor's centre suggests that a sixth / seventh century settlement site lies in the vicinity. The remnants of wattle structures along the Deben seem to confirm that people were living close by, and utilising the river probably as a source of food (fishing and wildfowling). We have not ascertained with any certainty the function of the wattlework structure revealed on the low tide line owing to its fragmentary state, although its topographic location points reasonably convincingly towards a fish trap. Whatever the case, the discovery represents an exciting new dimension to the story of Sutton Hoo, its changing landscape and communities.

Linzi Everett is a Project Officer with the Field Team at the Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service

Last February, society chairman, Lindsay Lee was invited to visit the survey area and view the wattle structure. Her comments on the visit: Field Officer, Linzi Everett and the survey team were very friendly and helpful. Getting down to the foreshore survey area wasn't easy and after falling headfirst in a ditch and almost losing my footing several times, I eventually reached the wattle structure, situated roughly midway across the River Deben. (In case you're wondering, the tide was out!) The wattle structure was clearly exposed in the mud and it was fascinating to examine at close quarters. At that time the C14 dating hadn't been completed, so discussion to its date and purpose was guess work (the C14 results have more than realized our hopes). I was most impressed by the survey team who were plotting and taking samples under the most difficult circumstances. My humble attempt at field walking, or should that be river-bed walking? was quite hair-raising, to remain vertical was a miracle and I was most disappointed (and red-faced) when my pre-historic pottery sherd find turned out to be a piece of river washed coal — I think I'll stick to terra firma thank you! (P.s. If any of you fancy trying to walk across the River Deben at low tide I strongly advise against it and take no responsibility whatsoever for the outcome!)

AN ANGLO-SAXON FIND FROM MARTLESHAM AIRFIELD

By John Newman

Some members of the Sutton Hoo Society may recall a number of letters to the East Anglian Daily Times during the early years of the recent research project in the mid 1980s advocating a careful search of jewellers records for the war years to see if any items of archaeological interest were found on the airfield developments in Suffolk and sold onto the market or recycled as 'scrap' gold or silver. At the time such a search seemed to be a good idea in theory but difficult to execute given the uncertain current location of any such records. However a find from the war years which has been recently reported to the County Archaeological Service reinforces the suspicion that an unknown number of Early Anglo-Saxon burials were destroyed during the extensive developments made necessary by the threat of invasion in the 1940s.

The find is a small gold disc, which has a diameter of 21mm, with an impressed decoration probably derived directly from a contemporary Merovingian coin of seventh -

More recently it was reported to the County Archaeological Service by a member of the finder's family and it is an object that is worthy of note in its own right as an important seventh - century find and for what it tells us about the general area of its recovery.

The find does not come from a secure and readily identifiable archaeological context as it was found as a stray object on the base in the early 1940s. However the general area of the findspot is of particular interest for Anglo-Saxon studies lying as it does across the Deben Valley in the Sandling region of Suffolk some 4 kilometres west of the royal cemetery of Sutton Hoo and 8 kilometres north east of the early trading wic or town of Ipswich which was growing in importance during the seventh - century.

The airfield which was initially developed in the First World War before expansion in the Second World War, lies on flat, former heathland 3 kilometres west of the River Deben. Due to the very poor quality of the



Above: Reverse of bracteate

tumuli were levelled during the First World War on the western edge of Martlesham Airfield. Several of these barrow sites were investigated in 1919 and one produced apparently primary inhumations of late sixth or early seventh - century date (*Reid Moir, 1921*)*

Therefore it would appear likely that the gold bracteate or uniface type object recovered as a stray find in the 1940s derived from another burial of seventh - century date of which there is no other record. The find is therefore of particular importance as it indicates evidence for the Anglo-Saxon period lost to the world of archaeology due to the wartime needs of the nation. Fortunately the talismanic quality of objects appears to have been good as the finder survived the war allowing this record to be made of an important find with a fascinating history. Whether wartime jewellers records can be located or are worth searching remains, however, an open question and one which will remain unanswered unless someone has the time to start what may well be a major task.

* Reid Moir, J. 1921 'The excavation of two tumuli on Brightwell Heath in Journal of the Ipswich and District Field Club, 1-14.'



Left: Seventh - century bracteate found on Martlesham Airfield near Woodbridge

century date. This type of object is generally known as a bracteate or uniface and is, in reality a form of medallion which may have come from a necklace or some such type of personal decoration. The disc clearly celebrates a cross-type motif in its centre and it is likely that a Merovingian coin with such a cross was chosen to create this bracteate as a conscious act directly linked to the growing Christian influence in seventh - century East Anglia. It is also probable that an object such as this bracteate came from a secure and deliberate deposit like an Anglo-Saxon burial.

This bracteate type object was found on Martlesham Airfield near Woodbridge by a serviceman on the base and was kept by the finder as a talisman or good luck charm.

soils of the Sandling heathland in south east Suffolk historic land use has, until recent times, been restricted to sheep grazing which has allowed relic features in the landscape to survive until the need for wartime and later redevelopment of the area. In particular evidence for prehistoric activity was preserved in the form of numerous round barrows, or tumuli, of probable Early Bronze Age date on Martlesham Heath until the early years of the twentieth - century.

Reuse of prehistoric burial mound either in a limited manner or as a focus for additional barrows or larger cemeteries is well attested in the earlier Anglo-Saxon period. Locally this can be seen on the adjoining Brightwell Heath where a small group of

John Newman is an authority on the archaeology of Suffolk and Sutton Hoo. He led the East Anglia Kingdom Survey in 1986 and was Director of the Tranmer House excavation in 2000 where a second Anglo-Saxon cemetery (500 metres from the famous 'royal' burial ground) dating from between the 6th and 7th centuries was discovered in advance of the construction of the National Trust Visitor Centre and car parking area.

2003 SUTTON HOO SOCIETY AGM

Tranmer House



Above: Retiring Society Chairman Dr Rosemary Hoppitt with her gift (antique map)

Photograph: Cliff Hoppitt



Above: Retiring members Bob and Pearl Simper receiving their retirement gift (engraved bowl) from the society president the Earl of Cranbrook
Photograph: Cliff Hoppitt

The Annual General Meeting was held on Friday 21 February 2003 at Tranmer House. The society's president the Earl of Cranbrook opened the meeting and took the chair until after the election of the new Chairman, Lindsay Lee, had taken place.

The new Chairman then presented a report for the year:

Membership at 31 December 2002 totalled 454, an increase of 75 from the previous year. Any previous doubts about public tour sales and the future of the society at Sutton Hoo after March 2002 were clearly unfounded. Between 14 March and the end of October society guides had taken 487 tours (of which 157 were pre-booked). This figure equates with at least 1700 people and was a remarkable achievement. Money from tour ticket sales was shared equally between the society and the National Trust and will form the main source of income for the society. Guiding and the guides training programme were highlighted as holding a high priority within the society's future planning.

Financial Report

The society Treasurer outlined the year's accounts. Tour fees had realised £12,888. Books and other sales £1571. Conference £3,651. The surplus for the year was £5,051. The balance at 31 December 2002 was £37,448

Funding

Included part of the National Trust display; geophysical work in the vicinity of Tranmer House; a travel grant awarded to a student studying Sutton Hoo at UCL; the purchase of two radios for the use of guides at Sutton Hoo (a health and safety requirement) and the re-printing of a book about Anglo-Saxon sailing ships.

In addition, the society agreed to fund the Intertidal Survey Project at Sutton Hoo being carried out by Suffolk Archaeological Service, (see article above).

A great achievement during the year was the society's publication of Bob Markham's *Sutton Hoo Through the Rear View Mirror 1937-1942*. Dr Rosemary Hoppitt and Dr Tom Plunkett spent many hours with the author and contributed to text.

As well as a new Chairman there were several committee co-options and nominations.

Brenda Brown was elected Minutes Secretary; Duncan Allan, Robert Allen, Alison Booth and Jane Wright elected as committee members. Trish Mulholland-Middleton was welcomed as new editor of Saxon and Robert Allen Publications Co-ordinator. The rest of the committee were elected en bloc.

Society Activities

The Spring Lecture and Conference present Sutton Hoo to the general public in a variety of ways, each one enabling a wider audience to participate to a greater or lesser degree in Sutton Hoo and broader Anglo-Saxon studies. Both represent the Society in 'advancing the education of the public' which is enshrined in the society's Constitution.

The 2002 Conference, focusing on the Conversion period, (see article above) was held at Suffolk Constabulary HQ, Martlesham, Ipswich on 12 October and was a sell-out. 238 delegates from across the country listened to six well respected academics in their field. Excess over expenditure totalled £1003.43.

The formal meeting ended on a high note of optimism for the future. Lindsay Lee emphasized that since the opening of the National Trust visitor centre, the changes at

Sutton Hoo had served to underline the society's strengths and now was the time to forge ahead and shape the society's future within the spirit of the original constitution: to promote the knowledge and understanding of Anglo-Saxon history and archaeology in East Anglia and the North Sea environs.

At the end of the meeting the Earl of Cranbrook presented gifts to retiring Chairman Dr Rosemary Hoppitt and to Bob and Pearl Simper who were retiring from the committee. All were founder members of the society in 1984 and it is largely because of their hard work and dedication that the Society has such a strong foundation to build upon. Bob and Pearl were presented with an inscribed bowl and Rosemary, as retiring Chairman, received a framed antique map. The society owes a great debt to Rosemary who has successfully steered the society from its small beginnings through to the present day.

2003 Autumn Outing

This Autumn we shall be visiting Flag Fen Bronze Age Centre near Peterborough, followed by a visit to Ely on 14 September. We will have a guided tour of Flag Fen including a viewing of the Norfolk Seahenge (optional). The afternoon will be based in Ely and the programme is packed full of activities or you can simply enjoy a peaceful walk by the river. The day's programme and booking form is enclosed in this issue. The trip is open to all members, including families and friends. We shall be running a coach from Suffolk (leaving Woodbridge 8.15am) but if you want to make your own way there that will be possible. For those who wish to join the coach, the places are limited, so please fill in the application form as allocations will be on a first come, first served, basis.



GUIDING

This season we say farewell and thank you to David Aldred and Fred Bridges who are both retiring as Sutton Hoo Society Guides. Both have guided countless members of the public around the burial site for many years and will be greatly missed.

We welcome six new guides this season: Monty Guest, Elizabeth Hailey, Tim Haxell, Gill Kimmerling, Jane Montgomery and David Robertson who are all discovering the joys of guiding.

More guides are needed. Burial Ground tours are central to the success of Sutton Hoo and of the Society and we need to increase our guide force. If you think you might like to be a guide please contact Lindsay Lee on 01728 688 718.

Sutton Hoo Opening Times

2003 summer season until the end of September — open every day between 10am and 5pm. From 1 October closed Mondays and Tuesdays.

Admission Adult £4. Child £2. Group rate £3.50. Guided tours by Sutton Hoo Society £2

For ALL information about site opening and visiting please contact the National Trust and NOT the Society

National Trust Sutton Hoo

Tel: 01394 389700

Fax: 01394 389702

Email: asoksx@smtp.ntrust.org.uk

Web site: www.nationaltrust.org.uk

Conference 2004

The 2004 Sutton Hoo Society Conference will be held on Saturday 16 October at the Royal Hospital School, Holbrook

Put it in your diary now! Booking details later

Discover what life was like for the early Anglo-Saxons at

WEST STOW ANGLO-SAXON VILLAGE



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tel: 01284 728718 email: weststow@stedsbc.gov.uk
or visit: <http://www.stedmundsbury.gov.uk/weststow.htm>



St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

WEST STOW VILLAGE — Activities

SEPT

Sun 21 (10.30am to 11.30am) AUTUMN BIRDS Ranger led walk around the Country Park.

OCT

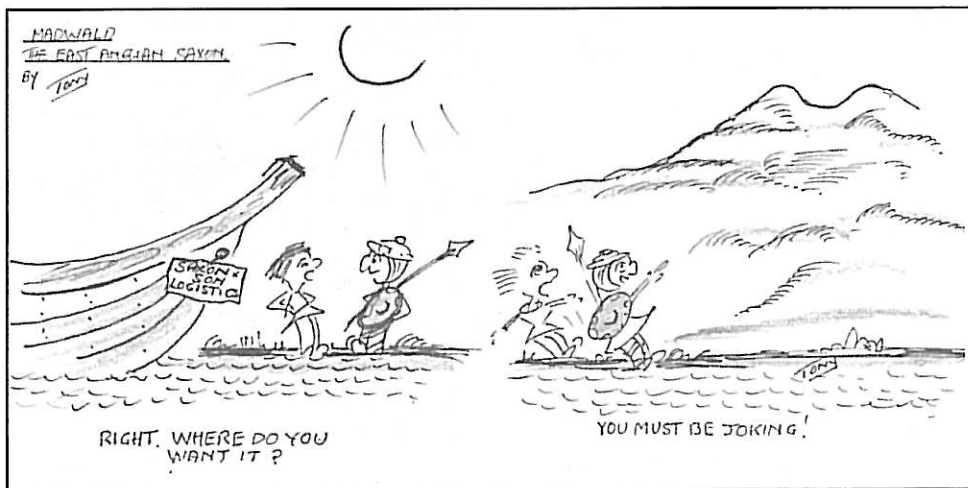
Sat 25 & Sun 26 MEET THE SAXONS Staying healthy and dying young; a costumed re-enactment hosted by the Wulfingas.

Mon 27 to Fri 31 IN SEARCH OF THE SAXONS The Ynglingas move into the village.

Wed 29 to Fri 31 NATURE TRAIL Follow the clues to discover the habitats and creatures of West Stow.

NOV

Sun 16 & Sun 23 (11am to 4pm) YULE FEST Festive cheer, shopping and live music.



Contact Addresses

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Who's Who — Sutton Hoo Society Committee Members

Chairman: Lindsay Lee Hon. Treasurer: Mike Argent Research Director: Martin Carver

Membership Secretary: Jenny Cant Minutes Secretary: Brenda Brown Guiding Secretary: Stewart Salmond Publications: Robert Allen

Duncan Allen Sue Banyard Alison Booth Nigel Maslin

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