Gippeswiche in 1539

above: Gippeswiche in 1539: a thumbnail view from the 1539 survey of the Suffolk coast
reproduced from MS Cotton Augustus I,i,58. Copyright the British Library board. All Rights Reserved

Following the Society AGM in February, John Newman gave members a fascinating insight into the history of Ipswich.

John explained some recent excavations in the town and summarized thoughts on the possible building sequence of St Peter's Church, which reconciles the church shown on the seal of the Priory of Saints Peter and Paul, with the church as it appears today (see over).

The audience was then treated to a splendid image of Gippeswiche (Ipswich, see above) taken from the 1539 Survey of the Suffolk Coast. The survey is anonymous but was officially commissioned at a time when Henry VIII feared invasion by the combined forces of France and Spain.

John Newman is the Field Contracts Manager at Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service

right: church appearing on twelfth-century seal of Priory of SS Peter and Paul
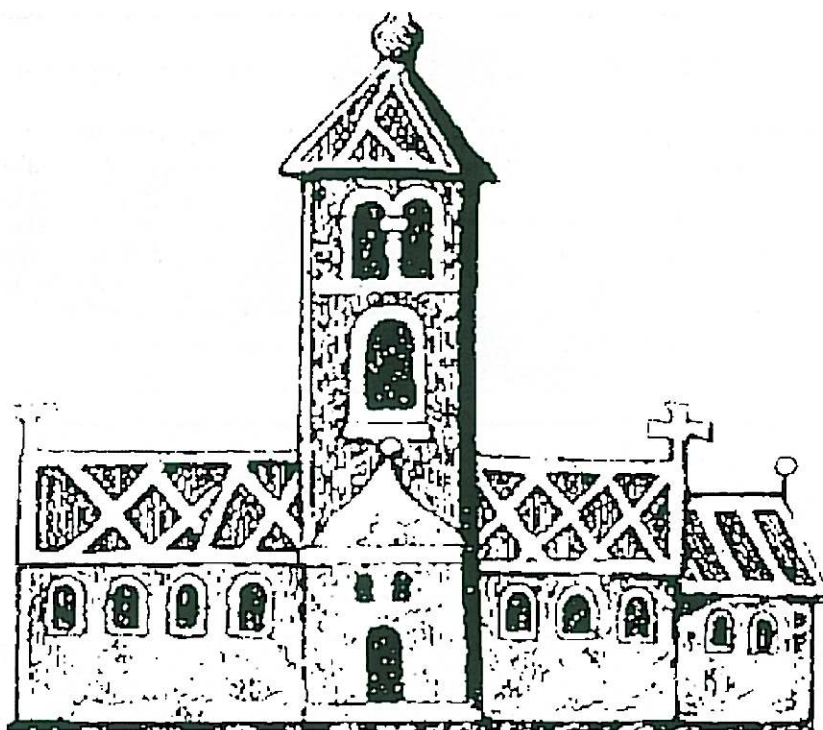
Assumptions

- *Church shown on seal defines footprint (the red and crisscross area on the outline plan)*
- *chancel roof sold 1528 to St Mary Quay Church. Truncated chancel and new east wall built for Wolsey by that date*
- *stone coffin excavated north of Wolsey's Gate in 1881 gives location of original high altar and length of priory canons' church*

People's church ← → | Screen | ← Canons' church →

ROOF SOLD TO ST MARY QUAY CHURCH 1528 (drawn to scale)
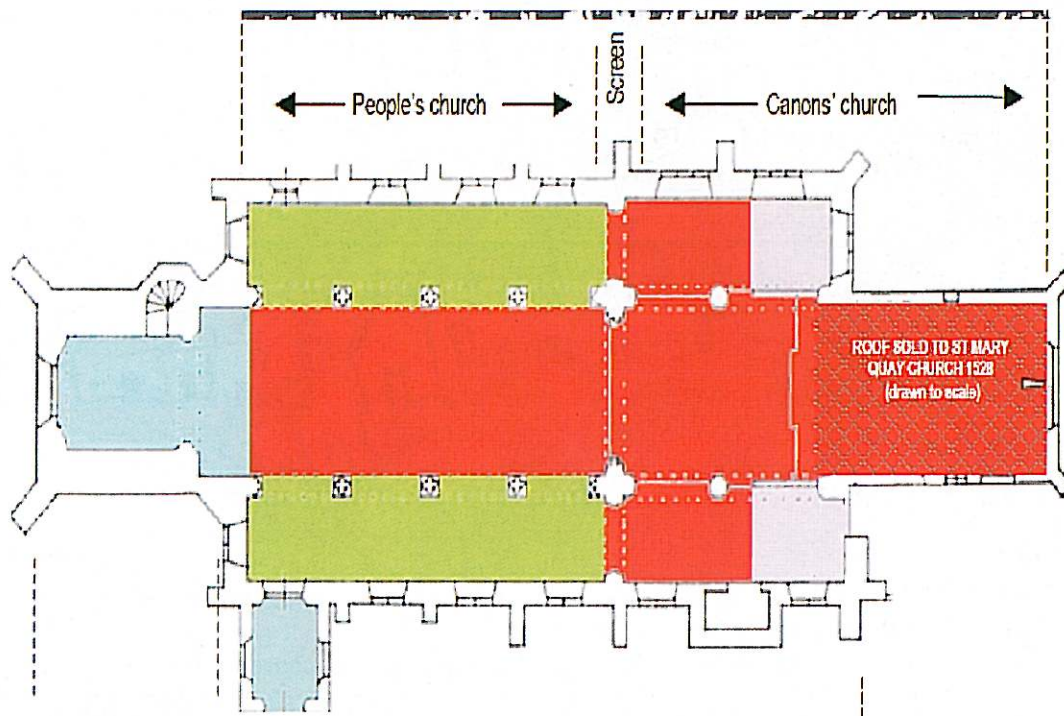
right: outline plan taken from Birkin Haward Suffolk Medieval Church Arcades, 280 St Peter; 276 St Mary Quay

below: St Peter's Church drawn by Henry Davy, 1840

KEY PLAN (approx scale)

Approx scale (feet)

twelfth to nineteenth century building sequence for St Peter's Church, Ipswich

- *cruciform church on seal*
- *aisles added c.1400, north aisle before south*
- *fifteenth- century tower and south porch*
- *later chancel aisles, north aisle built 1878, south before 1674*

⊡ approximate size and position of stone coffin excavated 1881 (first Prior?)
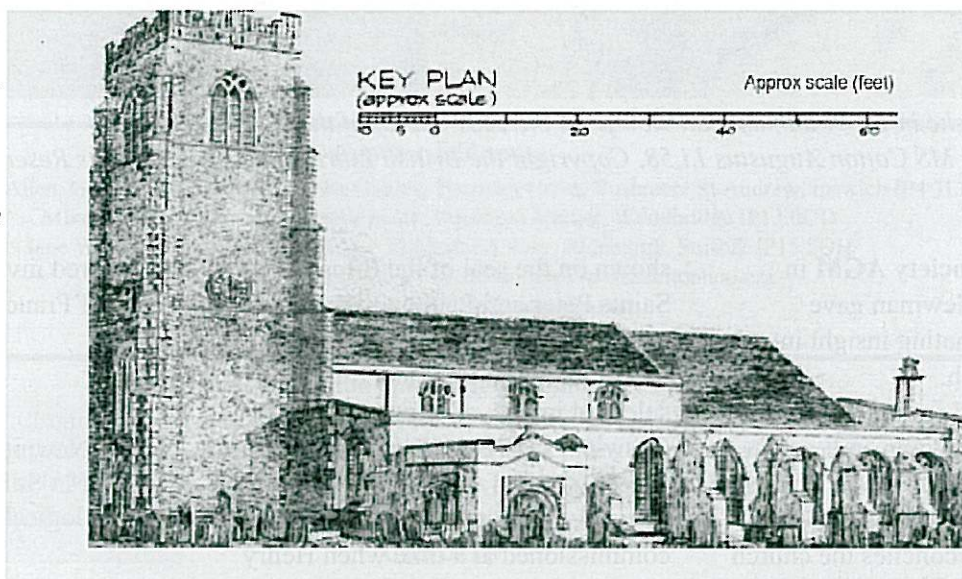
Members Outing: a Day out on the Deben, by Robert Allen

In a season characterised by wet and stormy weather an undaunted band of Sutton Hoo Society members and their friends boarded the M V *Jahan* at Waldringfield Quay on 1 July 2007. They were looking forward to a cruise on the navigable reaches of the Deben from Felixstowe Ferry to Woodbridge Tide Mill. The trip was, in many ways, a follow-up to the society's Spring Lecture *The River Deben as the Anglo-Saxons knew it*. The speaker on that occasion was Robert Simper who manfully agreed to lead the cruise, and was ably assisted by the skipper, Martin, who provided a commentary.

boarding the M V Jahan

Robert has spent practically all of his life on or near the river and, indeed, shortly after leaving Waldringfield we passed his house at Ramsholt and one of his boats riding at moorings in the river. He is the author of a number of books on maritime history, sailing and our East Coast rivers. His most recent (Volume 9 in the *English Estuaries* series), *Up the River Deben*, was published last year.

He and Martin were able to give us all kinds of known and lesser known information about this beautiful river. We heard of the various enterprises which have been undertaken throughout the years since the Angles sailed their ships into the estuary. We heard of the attempts to breed oysters on the river, of the ways in which the creeks and the marshes have changed through the years as a result of either human interference or neglect. The human interest was well exploited, with tales of the Quilter family at Bawdsey and the extraordinary developments which took place at Bawdsey manor in connection the last World War.

Throughout history, boat building has been a major activity on the Deben. Opposite Bawdsey Manor we could see the silted up entrance to the King's Fleet, once a significant harbour for the warships of medieval kings. Commercial ship building, often of quite large barges, took place at various shipyards on the river. One of the most famous yachts built at Woodbridge was Edward Fitzgerald's *Scandal* (this being the main product of Woodbridge, according to Fitzgerald). There was a variety of other

Robert Simper

commercial uses of the river in the past, particularly in the coprolite trade which led to the foundation of Fison's fertiliser business. Coal, of course, was imported and agricultural produce exported along the river highway. A particularly interesting piece of information is that quantities of the famous Suffolk 'white' bricks were shipped out from the dock at Martlesham Creek for the construction and/or subsequent repair of the White House in Washington.

A pleasant aspect of the cruise was the ploughman's lunch and glass of sherry served on board. The party had clear weather and, according to remarks as they disembarked, an enjoyable and worthwhile day.

The Myth of the Pagan Anglo-Saxon Cemetery, by Howard Williams

Introduction — Anglo-Saxon Paganism and the Grave

The myth of a pagan early Anglo-Saxon society that can be studied through its mortuary remains continues to permeate academic as well as popular scholarship. Early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries continue to be regarded as the pagan equivalent of the consecrated sacred space of subsequent Christian churchyards. They are perceived to be locations for the disposal of corpses but also places where ancestors were venerated, sacrificial rites were performed and ceremonies to honour the gods were enacted.

This short paper aims to suggest that this long-held view is something of a myth. By this it is meant that the 'pagan Anglo-Saxon' cemetery is a misleading construct of the last 150 years of archaeological research rather than a helpful concept for understanding the societies of southern and eastern England during the fifth and sixth centuries AD. The equation of furnished burial and field cemeteries with pagan belief has long been discredited in studies of Merovingian mortuary archaeology (Effros 2003). Similarly, over the last thirty years, early

Anglo-Saxon cemeteries have been investigated in terms of social structure, symbolism and ideologies rather than as direct evidence of religious belief. However, the equation of furnished cremation and inhumation rites and pagan belief continues to hold sway in many studies, making it necessary to outline some of the reasons why this association is problematic (see Meaney 2003; Wilson 1992).

Race, Migration and Paganism

The pagan religious label is closely connected to assumptions about the racial and cultural affiliation of the occupants of early medieval furnished graves. The concept of the pagan cemetery is closely bound up with concepts of a pan-Germanic racial and religious pagan purity that have been inherited from Victorian scholarship. This is also associated with the idea of complete population replacement and cultural discontinuity in the fifth century AD associated with large-scale Germanic migrations. While opinions differ on the timing, scale and character of Germanic immigration, this view is now over a century out-of-date (Hills 2003). It was

customary for Victorian scholars to use historic sources such as Tacitus' *Germania* and the poem *Beowulf* as evidence for burial customs. John Kemble, for example, regarded furnished graves as enshrining the most conservative and enduring 'values' and beliefs of members of the Germanic race following their migration to Britain (Kemble 1863). We need look only to the titles of Victorian books on early medieval grave-finds — such as John Yonge Akerman's 'Remains of Pagan Saxondom' (Akerman 1855) — to see the racial concepts this pagan label enshrined. While qualified and with less evident racial undertones, recent books and articles continue to perpetuate this view of early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries as vestiges of a coherent pagan culture (see Hills 2003; Williams 2002a). This is a fabrication of nationalist fantasy. (Andrén 2004).

A further problem with connecting mortuary practices and pagan beliefs is a failure to account for mortuary variability. Archaeologists have now recognised that labelling graves as 'Christian' does little to explain the variability in Christian-period mortuary ritual, whether referring to the seventh or the seventeenth century. If all we mean is to label pre-Christian

graves as pagan, then we need not bother investigating their character and diversity nor attempt to investigate what burial rites were about. However, if we wish to explain the diversity of mortuary practice in terms of cults and beliefs, we need to embrace its diversity and variability (see Andrén 2004; Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001; Hines 1997).

Social and Political Contexts

There is no doubt that religious beliefs and affiliations can influence the choices over disposing of the dead — affecting not only what people can do, but also what they mean by their practices. Yet ethnographic, anthropological and sociological studies of death show that many factors influence the manner of disposal (e.g. Ucko 1969). The social identity of the deceased, their social connections, political and economic factors, access to resources and wealth, ethnicities and traditions all have a role, as do the precise circumstances of death (Härke 1992; 1997). Moreover, death rituals are not the result of *decisions* made by either the dead person alone nor a single chief mourner about their beliefs. Instead, mortuary practices involve many different groups among the living including the family, households, communities, friends and allies as well as ritual specialists of different kinds. Funerals are therefore negotiations between many groups and decisions made about how to deal with the dead are rarely made purely in terms of religious belief of the deceased or the next of kin (Hines 1997). Also, death rituals are responses to more than simply the dead person — they might serve to allay the ghost of the person and pacify ancestors, deities, demons and gods.

Symbolism and Transformation

The meaning of things also affects the desire to identify Anglo-Saxon paganism from mortuary evidence. Early Anglo-Saxon society was pre-literature and the role of material culture in communicating and constituting statements about the dead has often been appreciated (e.g. Richards 1992). But mortuary rituals rarely set out a single statement of religious affiliation. Instead, as Martin Carver has argued for mounds 1 and 17 at Sutton Hoo, graves may contain layered and complex sets of allusions and may speak of the person when alive, their afterlife journey as well as any believed destination for the dead (Carver 2000; 2005).

Disposing of the dead concerns the *transformation* of the dead rather than the *representation* of a static identity. Therefore, funerals are negotiations and strategies serving to transform the dead from one state to another. As *rites of passage* therefore, mortuary practices were not primarily avenues for expressing beliefs or perceptions of the afterlife or cosmology. Instead they are ways of expressing bereavement and transforming the living and the dead (Williams 2006).

In all these ways we can see how problematic it can be to take any single aspect of early Anglo-Saxon mortuary practices and interpret a simple and direct meaning in terms of 'pagan belief'. Was cremation about releasing the spirit? Did
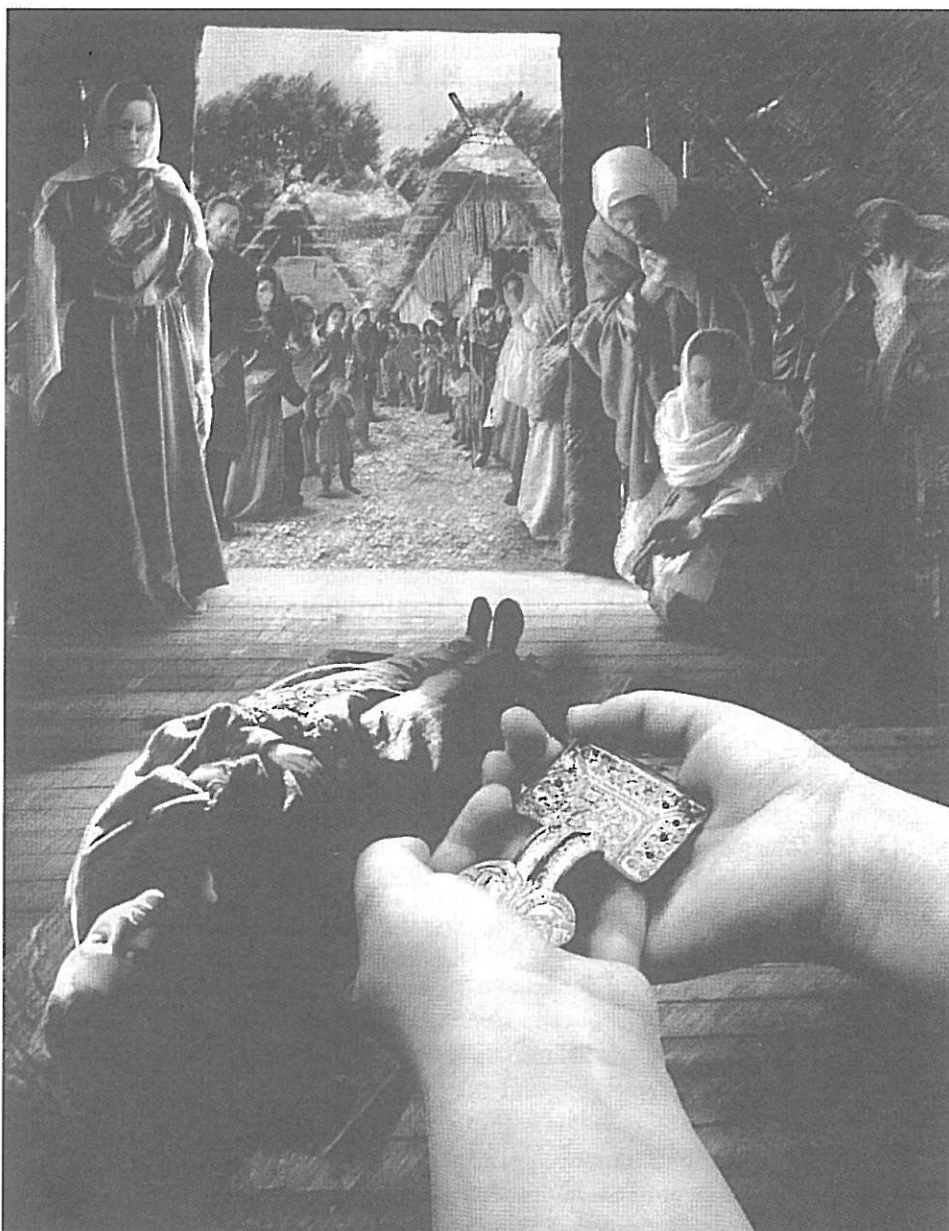
An artistic impression of the rituals involved in preparing and dressing an adult female for burial in the sixth century AD. The image serves to emphasise the likely public nature of the entire process from dying and death to disposal (artwork by Aaron Watson, figure 2.1 reproduced from Williams 2006, copyright Howard Williams)

amulets function to protect the dead'? Was boat-burial about a journey to another world? These questions are often difficult to answer not simply because of the challenges of the data available, but because they are the wrong questions.

Mortuary Archaeology Before Sutton Hoo

With these themes in mind, we can finally turn to the archaeological evidence and its diversity. Martin Carver (2000) has long argued that the variability and complexity of burial rites attested from the excavations at Sutton Hoo — including cremation, inhumation, the use of a variety of grave structures in different combinations including chambers and ships, and the use of mound burial itself, mark a princely or royal group responding to a shifting socio-political environment through the selective deployment of symbols, materials and resources. They were doing this to make specific statements about social identities and perhaps origin myths. What can be added to this statement is that the same

arguments can be extended somewhat to engage with the diversity of the fifth and sixth-century furnished burial rites that preceded Sutton Hoo.

For instance, let us consider the relationship between cremation and inhumation in early Anglo-Saxon England. Across England we find cremation and inhumation graves employed in different proportions and relationships. Sometimes we find the two rites used in equal measure contemporaneously, at other sites inhumation is the dominant rite with cremation used rarely or not at all (Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001). Meanwhile there are large cremation cemeteries in eastern England where inhumation remained a minority rite through the fifth and perhaps much of the sixth century. Each rite was internally diverse, with variability in the provision of artefacts and containers.

There is no denying that cremation and inhumation required different resources and technologies and afforded very different experiences and sequences of practices for those attending the funerals. Different artefacts

are associated with the cremated dead. As well as the carefully selected cinerary urns, often adorned with decorative schemes that would have been visible to the mourners, artefacts were selectively employed in cremation burials in a different manner from inhumation graves. Antler combs and toilet implements were sometimes deliberately placed with the cremated dead, perhaps because the cremation rite encouraged a different perception of the body in death (Williams 2003). Meanwhile other items are notable by their absence, including weaponry. Weapons may have been placed with certain cremated individuals on the pyre but it was not deemed appropriate or necessary for such items to be interred with the ashes (Williams 2005a). Moreover, there seem to be differences in the treatment of animals between the rites. Sacrificed animals were frequently placed on pyres and included with the ashes in eastern England, both as food offerings and as whole animals (Bond 1996; Williams 2001). Some of the cemeteries of communities that predominantly used cremation seem to have served a different significance to broadly contemporary inhumation cemeteries. Their size and the closely-packed location of graves suggest they served as collective burial sites of a number of settlements and farms (McKinley 1994; Williams 2002b).

Attempting to identify one single meaning to cremation and one to inhumation is facile. The rites were used together and in different combinations by the same communities. As with the choice of disposal method today, social, economic, religious and ethnic factors may have influenced the decision of the mourners as well as environmental factors (such as season or the availability of pyre material). What we cannot claim is a single, coherent and uniform pagan belief system manifest in the mortuary archaeology of the fifth and sixth centuries AD.

It is also important to remember that this diversity in burial rites may only be the tip of the iceberg. This is because the rites discussed so far are those visible to archaeologists. Unfurnished burials might easily be attributed to other periods without radiocarbon dating, while there remains
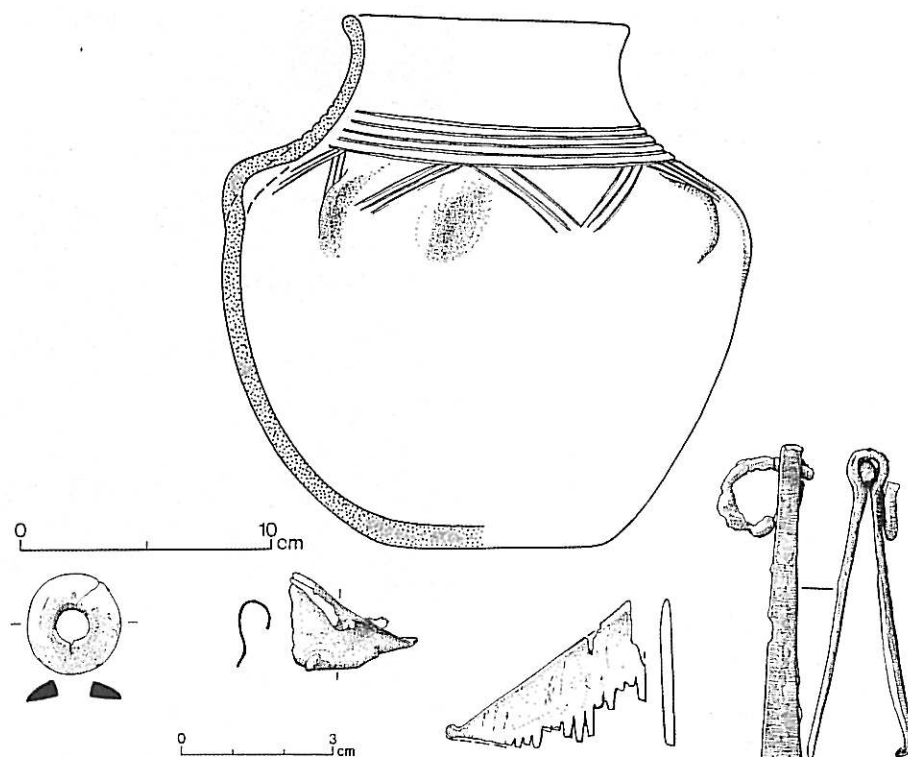
Cinerary urn, iron tweezers, fragment of bone comb, bronze sheet and a bone bead from grave 2915 at Spong Hill, Norfolk (adapted with permission from illustrations by Kenneth Penn in Hills et al. 1994; copyright Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service)

the potential that other disposal methods were employed that leave no archaeological trace: exposure, excarnation and water-burial. We might even speculate, given the hearths found amidst graves at Snape in Suffolk, that select cadavers were cooked or smoked while others were inhumed and cremated! Following cremation, earth-burial was but one option. Others might have included immersion in water, containment within above-ground structures or scattering.

Hence early Anglo-Saxon pagan beliefs and practices might have encapsulated a considerable diversity, with variation within and between communities across much of southern and eastern England in the fifth and sixth centuries

AD. Therefore while Sutton Hoo may appear unusual in the wealth, scale, exotic rites and exclusive location, in terms of variability and diversity it may not be so unusual as it first seems. The question is not 'what did cremation mean' but how we understand the contrasting ways in which it was employed. In different places and at different times, the *choice* between cremation and inhumation seems to have been employed in different ways. For some groups it appears that cremation spoke of continuity, conservatism and an enduring connection between the dead and the landscape. In other communities it served to mark internal social distinctions within the community. Finally in some areas it may have been a 'deviant' rite employed in only specific circumstances for certain individuals.

Discussion

Set against these ideas and data, it seems unhelpful to expect the archaeological evidence to tell us about religious belief in a direct and straightforward way. Rarely if ever is it likely that choices of burial rite were simplistic labels denoting 'I believe in Thunor'! In this light, those looking at early Anglo-Saxon graves and cemeteries expecting to find world-views clearly on display, and those anticipating easy answers to what burial rites 'meant' in terms of pre-Christian religion, are likely to be sorely disappointed or self-deluding.

The point being made here is not to deny a potential diversity of pre-Christian beliefs and practices, nor to ignore the influence of these ideas on the disposal of the dead. Certainly the pervasive and almost-exclusive *social* interpretation of mortuary practice and mortuary symbolism over the last thirty years of
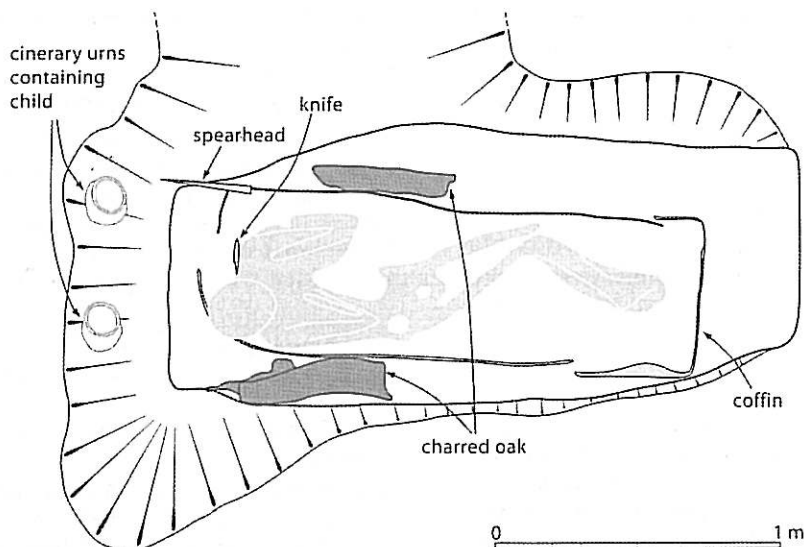
Plan of grave 17 from Snape, Suffolk, illustrating grave goods placed with the dead, including a spear and knife, also charred wood, and two cinerary urns deliberately placed on a ledge (redrawn by Séan Goddard after Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001, figure 4.5 reproduced from Williams 2006, copyright Howard Williams)

archaeological research has been unwarranted. What can be argued is that the search for a coherent pagan belief system is futile because of the intellectual baggage the concept carries, the lack of direct contemporary evidence to illuminate beliefs, that burial evidence is not only — nor indeed primarily — resultant in religious beliefs in pre-Christian societies and finally that mortuary practices are *rites of passage* rather than materialisations of religious doctrine.

Conclusion

The brief argument presented here may be read to suggest that it is futile to search for pagan beliefs in early Anglo-Saxon burial rites. Yet this is not the argument at all. On the contrary, this author has explored pre-Christian cosmologies in previous research papers including attempts to explain the significance of animal sacrifice in the early Anglo-Saxon cremation rite (Williams 2001), the decoration of cinerary urns (Williams 2005b) and the significance of the human head in pre-Christian art and mortuary practices (Williams forthcoming). What is argued is that a more sophisticated appreciation of the theoretical problems behind the reading of pagan beliefs from graves enables us (rather than disables us) in our quest for the societies and religious practices of pre-Christian southern and eastern England in the fifth and sixth centuries AD. This is not however a quest for a static and long-lived singular Anglo-Saxon paganism, but the search for diverse and shifting ritual practices and cosmologies informed by multiple influences and related to the specific requirements of the mortuary context.

Moreover in searching for an understanding of death and society in early Anglo-Saxon England, we should look to later written sources for inspiration but also cast our nets more widely to embraces theories and analogies concerning death and religious in history, sociology, anthropology and ethnography. It is important to accept the complex interactions of social, economic, political and religious factors in early Anglo-Saxon mortuary variability. If this means we cannot easily assign single explanations to a particular practice, then rather than being a bad thing, it illustrates that archaeologists have now matured and employ more critical, cautious and contextual readings of the early Anglo-Saxon mortuary evidence.

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An artistic representation of the rituals surrounding the reuse of a prehistoric mound for burial in the seventh century AD (artwork by Aaron Watson, figure 6.4 reproduced from Williams 2006, copyright Howard Williams)

Howard Williams lectures in Archaeology at the University of Exeter. At last year's society conference he explored how burning the dead and burying the ashes might be influenced by pragmatic, economic, social, political and ideological factors, as well as by strategies of commemoration.

A ONE DAY CONFERENCE

that will celebrate the 25ᵗʰ ANNIVERSARY of

the

IPSWICH

ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

10.00am to 5.30pm SATURDAY 27 OCTOBER 2007

St NICHOLAS CENTRE CUTLER STREET IPSWICH

IPSWICH

UNEARTHED

The conference will encapsulate the archaeological work undertaken in Ipswich since the Trust was formed. It will bring together leading experts on Anglo-Saxon Ipswich who will present the results of their more recent research.

Topics to be covered will include:

ROMAN BACKGROUND: Jude Plouviez – Archaeological Service, SCC

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: Steven Plunkett – Archaeologist

ANGLO-SAXON CEMETERIES: Chris Scull – Research Head, English Heritage

DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOWN: Keith Wade – Archaeology Manager, SCC

ANGLO-SAXON BUILDINGS: Tom Loader – Archaeologist

IPSWICH WARE POTTERY INDUSTRY: Paul Blinkhorn – Pottery Researcher

IPSWICH BONE & ANTLER WORKING: Ian Riddler – Finds Researcher

AGRARIAN ECONOMY: Peter Murphy – Coastal Strategy, English Heritage

CONFERENCE ADMISSION: £15 per person (includes coffee/tea & soft drinks)
Optional **SANDWICH LUNCH:** £ 5 per person (includes coffee/tea)
TICKETS may be obtained from: Mrs Eileen Ward

PIN BOARD

DIARY

Sutton Hoo Society AGM
**Friday 15 February 2008, 7.30pm
at Tranmer House, Sutton Hoo**

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

After the business meeting Dr Tom Williamson will give a presentation on the completion of the SHS research project *Sutton Hoo in Context: the Site and its Landscape.*

Sutton Hoo Visitor Centre Summer Exhibition
In 2008 this will be *The East Anglian Kingdom*, curated by Tim Pestell from Norwich Castle Museum. For more information and opening date contact the National Trust at Sutton Hoo.

SOCIETY EVENTS 2007/08

Society Outing
Saturday 20 October 2007

The Context of Sutton Hoo: A Mystery Tour of the Sandlings led by Dr Tom Williamson (University of East Anglia) for members, guides and friends.

Spring Lecture 2008
**Wednesday 26 March at 7.30pm
Tranmer House, Sutton Hoo**

This year's speaker will be Edward Martin who will present *The Sutton Landscape in its East Anglian Context.*

Entry charges (on the door) — Society members free, Non-members £4.00. Numbers limited —
to reserve a seat please contact Mike Argent on 01728 747 716 Car parking in Visitor Centre car park.

Society Conference
Arts, Crafts and Words in the Anglo-Saxon Mead Hall: the Roots of English Culture

Saturday 25 October 2008
Woodbridge School Conference Centre

Details and speakers to be confirmed at a later date.

EXTERNAL EVENT
Saturday 27 October 2007

Ipswich Unearthed, a conference to mark the 25th anniversary of Ipswich Archaeological Trust. For full details and booking information see previous page.

APOLOGIES
... to all our members for the late edition of Saxon, due to unavoidable circumstances.

Sutton Hoo Opening Times

Winter 2007/08

3 Sep–21 Oct	11am to 5pm	closed Mon/Tues
22 Oct–28 Oct	11am to 5pm	open every day
29 Oct–26 Dec	11am to 4pm	open weekends only
27 Dec–1 Jan 08	11am to 4pm	closed Wednesday
2 Jan–10 Feb	11am to 4pm	open weekends only
11 Feb–17 Feb	11am to 4pm	open every day
18 Feb–29 Feb	11am to 4pm	open weekends only

For all information about site opening, visiting and events please contact the National Trust, not the Society
Tel: 01394 389 700 Email: suttonhoo@nationaltrust.org.uk