



*The fictional family in the People of Sutton Hoo exhibition in the Treasury, featuring (left to right) mother Mildrith, small son Esi and daughter Ricula*

## Changing the displays

How to interest visitors without sacrificing the accuracy of the history and archaeology is an increasingly important issue at Sutton Hoo, as National Trust tries to attract repeat visits. 'Refreshing' the displays has recently involved raising Rædwald's burial chamber to floor level, where, in darkness, young visitors can place small bunches of herbs in the pagan burial. In the Treasury, the exhibition *People of Sutton Hoo* features named individuals who are in fact fictitious. Overleaf, two SHS members offer their personal views of the changes, and the curator of the Treasury exhibition replies. But first, NTS Property Manager MARTIN ATKINSON outlines the thinking behind these and other changes planned over the next ten years.

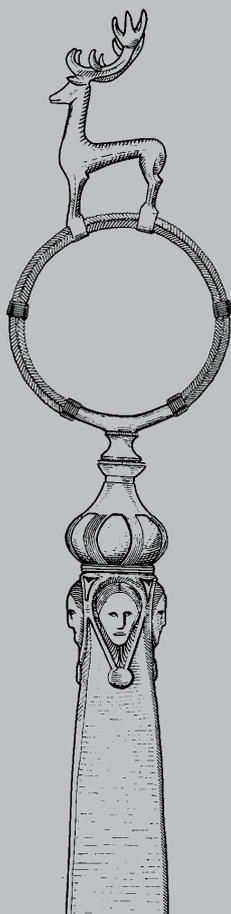
### Sutton Hoo in 2020

Although we are without the majority of the rich grave goods, and the physical remains of the ship were never any more than a collection of rivets and transient colour in the sand, the story of the discovery of this magnificent Dark Age burial and the atmosphere of the burial mounds are the real gems we have on site to capture the imagination of our visitors.

Enthusing them with that story so they tell their friends what a great day out they had and return time and again is key to the

future of Sutton Hoo, as we are so dependent on the income generated by our visitors. Over the next ten years we need to build our visitor numbers to a sustainable 120,000 to allow us reasonable spending for projects to keep the site fresh and exciting, as well as for the more routine maintenance of buildings and facilities. To achieve this Sutton Hoo needs to be a lively, vibrant, welcoming and exciting place for our visitors, volunteers and staff.

We will carry on with the work to interpret the 1930s era of discovery – building on the opening of Tranmer House to create a sustainable and fitting collection that not



only helps us tell the story of the discovery of the ship burial in a time of change and conflict, but is a warm and welcoming place for our visitors to experience a completely ‘hands on’ historic house – where they can feel at home as a guest of Mrs Pretty.

We will also continue with making the Anglo-Saxon world more accessible – building our collection of high quality replicas that can be handled by visitors and making the exhibition more interactive and accessible to all our key visitor segments. The exhibition itself will need to be refreshed within the next ten years, not necessarily by wholesale change but by gradual development – keeping the parts that work well, looking to create more of an impact and sense of awe by highlighting the wonderful reproductions, build on the collection of original artefacts and create a more permanent collection in the Treasury, whilst allowing for an element of change so we are still able to see some of the original objects on display in Suffolk.

We should retain the vision of reconstructing a full sized replica of the Sutton Hoo ship – this will be a major project and beyond the current plan, but in the meantime we will be constructing a full size sculptural model in the yard to help give a sense of scale to the burial and to help us interpret what happened to the ship after it was buried. From the ship, a timeline featuring carved stone slabs will help lead our visitors to the Burial Site.

To add life to the story, the costumed interpretation team will continue to develop their role, and the learning programme will widen to ensure that we cater for all ages and that both of these become more a part of what we offer to all our visitors every day we are open.

We will also become known as a place to celebrate crafts, culture and learning. We will develop the use of the Court facilities so it becomes known as a place where you can learn anything from Anglo-Saxon poetry to 1930s Lindyhop dance.

At the moment, visitor access to the countryside we own at Sutton Hoo is extremely limited, with the walks mainly following existing footpaths and tracks. Our visitors are missing out on some beautiful and dramatic views over the river from the woods at the top of the valley slopes and discreet hides could be constructed overlooking the wildlife-rich habitats of the Deben estuary. By 2020 the estate could also be providing a source of sustainable energy from biomass, and the roofs of the modern buildings lend themselves to cladding with PV cells, to help Sutton Hoo become one of the first carbon neutral historic properties in the National Trust.

Martin Atkinson



*Rædwald's burial chamber BEFORE the changes...*

## Created characters

**SHS volunteer guide NICK WRIGHT fears that we are in danger of confusing our visitors historically, and begs for a little more scholarship in the displays.**

I should preface any remarks on developments at Sutton Hoo with praise for the energy and commitment of the National Trust staff and volunteers there. I never cease to be amazed by the pace of change in the experience offered to visitors in the Visitors' Centre, and in the Exhibitions, and by the Trust's continuing ability to attract large numbers of apparently satisfied customers to the site.

As a former academic and an SHS volunteer-guide of 'long-' if not particularly 'out-' standing, I have always been a little uneasy with the relationship between the honest presentation of the story of Sutton Hoo and the demand to be popular to all possible groups. There is no easy solution, but to me it reveals a conflict between the quite respectable interests of the Sutton Hoo Society and the equally respectable, but different, interests of the National Trust.

The current exhibition features a mere handful of quite low-grade finds together with the old (but excellent) information panels and reproductions. The three

very prominent 'created' Anglo-Saxon characters who 'might have been' (but never were), bring all my misgivings to a head.

Do we really need the might-have-beens? Don't they create confusion for those who don't know, and embarrassment for those who do? In the midst of people who actually existed in the 7th century, should we really be involved in imaginative exercises for teaching history at primary and GCSE level, which only highlight the enormous gulf between an exuberant imagination and the evidence itself? We actually KNOW quite a lot.

I have always felt that we underestimate the capacity of the general public, including school children, to cope with the complexity, uncertainty and contradictions of scholarship and research. Where does the Sutton Hoo Society sit in the gentle conflict (so gentle that it is almost silent) between the scholars and the popularisers? Might we, the Sutton Hoo Society, buck the trend, and side more solidly and openly with the scholars?



*...and AFTER. All photos Nigel Maslin*



*Rædwald among the herbs in the new display*

## Raising the burial

SHS member Dr JENNY JAMES fears that something has been lost in raising and enclosing the burial chamber reconstruction.

The restructuring of the burial chamber in the exhibition at Sutton Hoo is a totally retrograde step. The original display enabled visitors to see clearly the replicas of the burial goods and their position. The display was well lit and the view from above extensive. Now it is in semi-darkness and most of the objects are obscured.

We had a visitor who had not been here before and explained to him that the burial chamber was the highlight. He looked extensively at the rest of the display but stayed only a couple of minutes in the burial chamber. I contrasted this with bringing my grandson last year. He spent nearly thirty minutes gazing at all the objects and asking about each one.

This links in my mind to the lack of treasures from the British Museum in the Treasury. Surely the money unnecessarily spent on the changes could have been used to fund a proper display of some of the original treasure similar those of great distinction that we have had in the past.

## Appealing to the emotions

ANGUS WAINWRIGHT is the National Trust archaeologist for East Anglia, the curator of the *People of Sutton Hoo* exhibition, and also a member of the SHS committee. Here he explains the intentions behind this summer's new displays at Sutton Hoo. I think everyone would agree that we want all our visitors to understand the significance of Sutton Hoo and the Anglo-Saxon period. We want them to learn about Sutton Hoo, but we also want them to be enthused by the place and by what it tells us about Anglo-Saxon culture.

The challenge for all of us - whether we are leading a guided walk or creating an exhibition - is to work out how to do this. How do you translate the massive body of research on the period into a form which appeals to the general visitor?

One way of answering the question is to find out what type of people visit the site and create forms of interpretation which appeal to those different types of visitor. Visitor research at Sutton Hoo has discovered that our current interpretation does a good job with visitors who like factual information and come with a basic knowledge of the period. However a significant number of our visitors are either children or adults who are just

there for a pleasant day out and would be just as likely to come to Sutton Hoo if it was a pretty garden, rather than an internationally important archaeological site. The current exhibition does not appeal to these people, so how do we convert them into Sutton Hoo enthusiasts?

One answer is to appeal to their emotions. This was the thinking behind the changes to the burial chamber display and the current temporary exhibition, *People of Sutton Hoo*. This exhibition builds on a basis of modern scholarship on the subject, but develops its themes through the medium of an imaginary family. The exhibition is prefaced by an explanation of the fragmentary nature of the evidence and that the family you meet is an imaginary creation. The approach taken both here and with the new burial chamber may not appeal to everyone, but hopefully those who do not like this form of interpretation will find satisfaction elsewhere in the exhibition.

Sutton Hoo, like all other National Trust sites, is owned for the benefit of the whole nation and so the Trust has a responsibility to explain its properties to all sectors of society. To do this it must use every means available, but its interpretation should always be honest and backed by the best scholarship.

The exhibition *People of Sutton Hoo* continues until 30 October. Saxon welcomes further views on the issues raised here – emails to the editor, please.



THE SUTTON HOO SOCIETY IN COLLABORATION  
WITH THE ROYAL GUSTAV ADOLF ACADEMY, SWEDEN  
PRESENTS AN INTERNATIONAL DAY CONFERENCE

# SUTTON HOO: A SWEDISH PERSPECTIVE

11TH SEPTEMBER 2011,  
WATERFRONT BUILDING, UNIVERSITY CAMPUS SUFFOLK, IPSWICH



## THE CREMATION GRAVES OF VALSGÄRDE

**Professor emerita Anne-Sofie  
Gräslund,  
Uppsala University**

The burial ground of Valsgärde in Uppland, Sweden, has since the 1930s been one of the most prominent sites in Scandinavian and European funerary archaeology. Hitherto, almost all focus has been placed on the 15 boat graves, while an almost equal number of inhumations without boats as well as around 60 cremation burials have been more or less forgotten. This has resulted in a very narrow perspective on the history of the burial ground. Together with John Ljungkvist I have a project aiming at publishing the cremation graves and the non-boat-grave-inhumations. We work at reconstructing the history of Valsgärde burial ground from the Pre-Roman Iron Age to the late Viking Age. The former “one per generation” view of boat graves can be challenged by new evidence.

A detailed chronology of the site reveals that the role or importance of the site as burial ground has varied considerably over time. During some periods it is an almost exclusive élite necropolis, while in other phases a wider social span can be seen. In the 9th century, when boat burials seem to be almost missing, the lack of such élite burials is partly filled with a large, very special cremation grave. Of particular interest are also the female élite cremation burials, previously almost entirely neglected. There are rich female burials from the Vendel Period and from the 10th century, but after 950/975 there seem to be no female graves at all – especially enigmatic as the male burials without boats continue well into the 11th century.

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## BYZANTIUM IN EASTERN SWEDEN AND BEYOND - EXOTIC OBJECTS AND NEW CONNECTIONS 550-700 AD

**Dr Torun Zachrisson,  
Stockholm University**

Unexpectedly numerous Byzantine objects from the Merovingian Period have been found in central Sweden. They have been found in burials of the highest elite, like the West Mound in Old Uppsala. Among the melted remains of grave goods in that mound were gaming pieces of ivory along with other exotic items like woven gold threads probably from silk of Byzantine origin, as well as five Byzantine cameos of onyx and sardonyx. The monumental mounds start to be erected in this period and tell us that this was not a property of the usual farm size. The three monumental mounds of Old Uppsala visualize the establishment of a royal genealogy where property claims were related to a realm. Old Uppsala is known in the written sources as the seat of god Freyr and his descendants. These exotic objects appear after the climate crisis in the 530s, and illustrate new connections and alliances with Byzantium, but also the Anglo-Saxons. These objects seem

to have been used in the construction of the ruling ideology of the Ynglingar and may have given legitimacy to demands for sovereignty and the necessary authority to exploit the royal estates. The exotic objects could also have played a major role in the funerary rituals. The women next below in rank were buried with amethyst pearls originating from the Mediterranean area and/or ivory rings. Interestingly the mounds for these women seem to have been relatively dispersed over central Sweden. It is possible that these type of objects are the tangible expressions of a desire to attend the court at various locations in central Sweden, among them the royal court at Old Uppsala. In contemporaneous continental Europe the material culture of the elite among for instance the Merovingians and the Visigoths, are very influenced by this courtly life style.

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**AN EYE FOR ODIN?  
THE SHARED WORLD-VIEWS  
OF SCANDINAVIA AND  
SUTTON HOO**

**Professor Neil Price,  
University of Aberdeen**

In an archaeological assemblage as famous and exhaustively studied as the finds from the Mound 1 ship burial at Sutton Hoo, it is tempting to believe that the material holds few surprises any more. This paper begins with a new analysis of the Sutton Hoo helmet, following up some startling observations first developed by Paul Mortimer, the Society's very own King Rædwald. Particular attention will be focused on the treatment of the eye area of the helmet, compared with the archaeology of eyes on the war-gear of Scandinavian elites at the same time as Sutton Hoo – an unexpectedly fruitful area of research. The links between the treatment of eye-themes on high-status metalwork will be considered in the light of stories from Norse mythology, and

used to argue for a precise and very close affinity between the world-views of the Sutton Hoo elites and the military rulers of Sweden during the fifth to seventh centuries. The implications are important, in that they firmly demonstrate Anglo-Swedish connections not just in terms of material culture, technology and burial custom but in the ideas that crucially underpinned them.

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**GAMLA UPPSALA AND  
VALSGÄRDE – NEW RESEARCH  
ON TWO ELITE BURIAL SITES IN  
MIDDLE SWEDEN**

**Dr John Ljungkvist,  
Uppsala University**

This paper considers the structure and development of Valsgårde and Gamla Uppsala, two of the most famous early medieval sites in central Sweden and closely related to Sutton Hoo and Anglo-Saxon England. I will focus upon the questions of how these sites emerged as elite constructions during the Scandinavian Iron Age, and how they continued to be used as a centre and aristocratic burial ground well into the 11th and 13th centuries respectively. A phase worth some extra attention is the mid-6th to 8th centuries AD. During this period we can see the emergence of monumental mounds, major halls raised up on artificial earth terraces, new burial rites and changing imports. The sites are quite different in a number of ways. However, both reflect contemporary

changes that can be seen all over central Sweden and further into the Baltic. I am presently working on a funerary project in cooperation with Anne-Sofie Gräslund and also leading a research project covering the general development of Gamla Uppsala, including excavations in the royal estate area. Excavations during the summer of 2011 will shed some further light upon the development of the central manor area and especially cover layers and constructions from the early medieval period. By September I can guarantee interesting preliminary results as the trial excavations made in 2010 were very promising.

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**STYLING DEATH –  
MATERIAL METAPHOR IN BOAT  
GRAVES FROM  
7TH-CENTURY VALSGÄRDE**

**Professor Frands Herschend,  
Uppsala University**

A new series of 14 radiocarbon tests have given us fairly exact funeral dates for three of the early boat graves, Nos 5, 7 and 8, from the Valsgårde cemetery in Uppland, Sweden. These dates are in all probability linked to the primary burial ceremonies when the boats were not yet covered up. Owing to the careful 20th-century documentation of the funeral scene, basically a documentation of what the funeral party saw, two of the dates allow us to understand these graves as installations so closely linked to each other that a number of people probably visited both funerals. Most probably one of the burials belongs to the 640s and the other to the 650s. We may thus ask ourselves whether as grave metaphors they were linked to each other. The last

grave illustrates another phenomenon. Since three 14C-dates from one and the same animal, a calf representing the meal in Grave 7, are c.75 years older than four dates from the collapsed roof construction, we may infer that the burial scene had a considerable after life as an accessible yet untouched and decaying installation with a significant presence among the living. In this particular case the old boat grave stood as a covered construction when the two new ones were the funeral scene.

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# Benjamin Britten and other visitors



*Biddie and Rhoisie Copinger Hill*

**NIGEL MASLIN** remembers working in the ship trench in mound 1 at Sutton Hoo during the re-excavation of the mid-1960s. In this second part he recalls some special visitors.

The mid-sixties were the years of Benjamin Britten's three Church parables, which had their world premières in Orford Church, where there is a commemorative round slate plaque in the floor. The Rector was Revd Kenneth Sherlock, whose son David was reading ancient history and helping on the dig. 1966 was the year of *The Burning Fiery Furnace*, so while excavating we used the kneelers the 'monks' had used in the première, oval plastic sponges covered

in cloth, with a broad strip of elastic to go behind the knee.

The Britten connections continued. David's cousins, the Misses Copinger Hill, were identical twins, Biddie and Rhoisie. They were in their fifties and lived, they said 'in the ugliest house in Saxmundham'. Park House was actually a gabled treasure trove of family heirlooms and fine carpets. They spoke knowingly of how it was not right 'these days' to have a private income, but that it was 'very nice'. They were charmingly and delightfully old school, always bringing home-made treats for everyone from local fêtes or their own kitchen and garden. They seemed to regard the ship trench as almost holy ground, and meticulously cleared the surrounds and made tea.

"Benjy would love this," they said one day in 1967, looking down into the fully excavated ship.

"Benjy?"

"Yes, Benjamin Britten."

"Do you know him, then?"

"Oh yes, all our lives!"

So 'Benjy' duly came out in the white open-top Alvis and climbed, appropriately frontways, down the ladder into the ship, for a guided tour with Dr Bruce-Mitford. Nearly everyone else was at a distance, hence my inadequate photo. With him were two friends who were helping us on the dig, Eric and Nancy Crozier. Eric was the producer of two of his operas – *Peter Grimes* and *The Rape of Lucretia* – and his librettist for *Albert Herring* and (with

E.M.Forster) *Billy Budd*. Nancy (Evans) was a celebrated mezzo-soprano who, alternating with Kathleen Ferrier, had created the title role of Lucretia, and also of Nancy in *Albert Herring*.

I ran after Eric as he was leaving with Britten, in case it was his final visit, for it was near the end of the season and everything had been cleaned up for photography. Of course, Rupert then had to introduce me to Britten, which was an opportunity to ask if he had met a friend of mine at Sussex University, who was a Hesse student at that year's Aldeburgh Festival. He said he had not, because he was so busy organising and rehearsing the festival that he could not spend much time with the Hesse students. Britten's friends remember a warm and approachable personality, but I was struck by a deeply serious, private person, with great depth in the eyes.

The Croziers lived in a cottage at Little Glemham and invited us round one evening. Mike and I had been messing about in a dinghy on the Deben and arrived very late and bedraggled. A note pinned to the door said they had gone over to their friends the Cranbrooks at Great Glemham, and showed a sketch map. Mike had borrowed his father's car, and its headlights picked out a long avenue and then swept across the castellated front of Great Glemham House. The answer to the bell pull was a jovial handshake and, "Hello, I'm Lord Cranbrook, do come in!" The Copinger Hills used to



*Benjamin Britten descending the ladder into the ship*



*Nancy and Eric Crozier talking to Rupert Bruce-Mitford (back to camera)*

go on his seasonal fungus forays and bat-catching expeditions, for he was a noted nature conservationist and spoke on environmental issues in the House of Lords. He was, of course, father of the present earl, our Society's president. Everyone was very smartly dressed and in the middle of a splendid buffet. Mike and I wished we had changed, but perhaps you can get away with such things in your teens.

There were specialist visitors to the site, too. Basil Brown himself appeared, in cap and suit and tie, as did the main excavator who took over from him in 1939, the Cambridge archaeologist Charles Phillips. Of great importance to international ship specialists was evidence for the keel of the ship. Ole Crumlin Pedersen from the Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde, and Arne Emil Christensen, curator of the Oseberg and Gokstad ships in Oslo, spent hours in the bottom of the ship as Valerie Fenwick carefully sectioned the elusive traces in the sand.

At the start of the second year, 1966, I spent a long time lying on a plank across the stern – too long, according to Yvonne – helping, as I hoped, to get a cross-section of the stem. Later I was amidships, plotting all the rivets in three dimensions. A local datum line ran the length of the mound at ground level. Below that we levelled in a five foot-square grid of perforated metal angle-bracket, which stood on adjustable legs. From that you could use a tape measure and plumb line to work out the co-ordinates, which you called out to someone sitting on the side of the trench, recording them on a drawing board. Gay Keiller's photo (*SHSB* 1, 244 fig 169) shows Paul Sieveking doing the measuring, and me on the bank with the drawing board. All the rivets were given numbers, impressed on copper tags, pushed into the soil on a nail. Eventually they were all lifted for further examination and soil samples taken throughout the ship for phosphate analysis.

There was, of course, no wood remaining in the ship, except perhaps for a soggy mass at the top of one of the ribs on the starboard side. It was nothing really tangible or liftable, but rather a black patch that you could stick a trowel into at first, when it was kept sprayed under polythene. But there was nothing to be done with it, and when it was left to dry out into charcoal-like slithers, it tended to blow away. Otherwise the 'skin' of the ship was exactly that: a thin, black, almost mummified membrane, stained dark brown around the iron rivets, marked white by the lines of absent caulking and sandy brown beneath. But this was visible only in one or two places: elsewhere only the lines of rivets, some with signs



*Left to right: Rupert Bruce-Mitford (left), Charles Phillips and Yvonne Crossman discussing the stern of the ship. Note the datum line (centre)*

of grain, traced the outline of the ship, and crusty, discoloured sand suggested the form of the ship's timbers, rather like the vestigial limbs of the more recently excavated 'sand bodies'.

The major event of the next year, 1967, was making the plaster cast. Remember that the ship is roughly 90' x 14' x 9', which made a pretty big cast. It was done in sections of a couple of square metres, the keel-line and rib intersections dictating the joins. Iron hoops were set in the plaster so that the sections could be winched out. Making it was simply a matter of buckets of plaster and 'fun for all the family'. It seemed to bring out the child in the fun-loving Nigel Williams, the future Chief Conservator of Ceramics and Glass at the British Museum and restorer not only of the Sutton Hoo helmet, but also the Portland Vase. He died suddenly in 1992 while working on a museum excavation in Aqaba, but I can still hear his happy chortling. The casting of the ship was a brave experiment to preserve its shape and size at the time, but it was so deformed by then that the final resin cast was not a thing of beauty. It was on display for some years in the National Maritime Museum, but is now stored away.

I worked on the dig for roughly a month in three successive years, 1965, 1966 and 1967, during university vacations. They blend into one long summer in my mind, and a wonderful atmosphere of stability and calm that has never left me. I kept coming back – to a Britten-Pears performance of *Winterreise* in 1971; to help Valerie Fenwick excavate Burrow Hill in the following few years

– until in 1984, like several others from the excavation, I bought a house locally. Sutton Hoo has changed all our lives, so that personal meaning is added to historical and archaeological significance to make the site ever more mysteriously compelling for us. A historic landscape becomes a personal landscape, and the national memory, personal memory.

*SHSB: Sutton Hoo Ship Burial* (British Museum, 1975) vol. 1, ch. IV (A), pp. 230-302, gives Dr Rupert Bruce-Mitford's overview of the sixties re-investigation of the ship.



*Conservator Nigel Williams plotting rivets in the bow area*

# ***Kent in the Age of Sutton Hoo: new perspectives from Lyminge***



*Figure 1 One of 2010's sunken-featured buildings under excavation at Lyminge. All photos and plan © University of Reading.*

Our last issue reported the publication of the later Anglo-Saxon settlement at Bishopstone in Kent by Dr GABOR THOMAS, Lecturer in Early Medieval Archaeology at the University of Reading, with a promise that he would tell us about his current excavation at Lyminge in this issue. Here he describes the recovery of a whole settlement sequence for 'the long 8th century' at Lyminge, providing the first material insights into the 'Christianisation' of a Kentish royal vill.

## **Two kingdoms on the eve of the Conversion**

The emergence of the fledgling kingdoms of Kent and East Anglia in the decades around AD 600 created two new powerful forces to contest the busy sea-lanes lying off the two most southerly peninsulas of Eastern England. Borne by these maritime highways, Christianity was soon exploited as an ideological weapon in the war for supremacy between the rival royal houses: Rædwald's decision to sever ties with the new religion on assuming the title of *bretwalda* of the southern English kingdoms (on the death of Ethelbert of Kent, to whom he had previously pledged solemn allegiance through baptism), must be seen as a statement of political independence, one which reversed the early success enjoyed by the Roman mission under Ethelbert's patronage.

Ultimately, however, Christianity was to bring the two nascent powers closer together, a relationship nurtured under the influence of the Frankish church

which had been directly represented on Kentish soil since Ethelbert's marriage to his Frankish princess, Bertha, and which was to guide the Christianisation of the East Anglian kingdom through its first Bishop, the Burgundian Felix, sent by Archbishop Honorius in the company of 'teachers and masters according to the practice of Canterbury' (Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, III, 18). Not long after the establishment of the first East Anglian see in AD 631, princesses from the interrelated Kentish and East Anglian families entered Frankish nunneries to become royal abbesses, a fashion which soon spread to Kentish soil where a network of aristocratic double houses sprang into being, the most instructive example in the current context being *Minster-in-Sheppey*, constructed (c. AD 675-9) for Sexburgh, daughter of the East Anglian king Anna and widow of Eorconberht of Kent (for an account of this process, see Blair 2005, 84-91).

This historical prelude, seen exclusively through the eyes of Bede, hopefully

highlights why a Kentish perspective is fundamental to contextualising the rise of East Anglian political hegemony during the first half of the 7th century, by which we may stand to gain a more nuanced reading of the meanings and intentions behind overt ideological statements of the likes excavated at Sutton Hoo. Up until fairly recently, the basis for reconstructing this Kentish context has rested on an imbalanced archaeological dataset dominated by an impressive corpus of cemeteries and a small but important group of early churches, most subject to antiquarian investigations in the 18th and 19th centuries (see Welch 2007 for an overview). By contrast, the settlement archaeology of Anglo-Saxon Kent (outside fragments of habitation colonising the ruins of the former Roman towns of Canterbury and Dover) has lagged behind other parts of eastern England, especially East Anglia with its enviable corpus of extensively excavated rural settlements including Brandon and Carlton Colville.

Fortunately, the picture is now starting to change with recent examinations of 6th-7th century settlements (in some cases with portions of attendant cemeteries) at multiple sites on the line of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (e.g. Saltwood, near Folkestone), with road schemes and housing developments increasing the tally still further, especially in the extreme

east of the county on the Isle of Thanet. One important supplement to this recent commercial archaeology has been an ongoing campaign of research excavations led by the University of Reading at the village of Lyminge, located on the North Downs some 10 miles south of Canterbury and 4 miles inland from the nearest stretch of the south coast on the western fringes of Folkestone. The first two seasons of this project, initiated by the author back in 2007, targeted an area to the south of the churchyard preserving archaeological strata of exclusively Mid-Saxon (8th-9th century) date - what appears to be a swathe of domestic occupation and light industry which developed around the inner precincts of a royal double monastery founded - if traditional accounts are to be believed - by Queen Ethelburga of Kent in AD 633 (for a critical analysis of the historical sources relating to Lyminge, see Kelly 2006). However, in a dramatic turn of events an entirely separate settlement precursor of the 6th-7th centuries materialised in 2010, a discovery which is set to cast penetrating new light on the dynamics and social context of Christianisation in the Kingdom of Kent during the Age of Sutton Hoo. The remainder of this paper will provide a provisional summary of the results of the past three year's excavation, focussing on Lyminge's unique potential to reveal how Anglo-Saxon communities and settlements were transformed in an age of Christian conversion.

### A Kentish royal vill emerges

7th century charter references combined with the meaning of its archaic place-name provide a clear indication that Lyminge was performing the role of a district-centre-cum-royal vill in the period leading up to the foundation of the monastery - a pedigree shared by several other known royal nunneries in the kingdom of Kent (Brooks 1984, 183-7). This pre-Christian background provides a context for the discovery by which Lyminge is probably best known to Anglo-Saxon archaeologists: the inhumation cemetery excavated on the northern fringes of the village which included a contingent of richly furnished graves attesting to an élite social presence in the locality by the second half of the 6th century (Warhurst 1955). This site almost certainly represents one of a cluster of burial grounds focussed on the village (as indicated by isolated burials found at at least two further sites) - a multiplicity shared by other early district centres in Kent, most notably nearby Eastry, target of an ongoing project by the University of York's Tania Dickinson.



Figure 2 A selection of the glass recovered from one of the sunken-featured buildings.

The remarkable discoveries of 2010 provide our first glimpse of the physical reality behind what has long eluded archaeologists: the domestic component of a Kentish royal vill. In some respects the character of this archaeology is actually quite unremarkable, for the portion of the settlement sampled in the excavations, characterised by a diffuse spread of sunken-featured buildings (Figure 1) and averagely-sized timber halls, is a piece with other recently

excavated 6th-7th century settlements in Kent, including Church Whitfield, near Dover (Welch 2007, 203-6). What clearly differentiates Lyminge from these sites (indeed from the mainstream repertoire of contemporary settlements excavated across England) is the richness of the cultural assemblages recovered from two sunken-featured buildings evidently infilled on abandonment with large dumps of primary refuse. The clear impression given by the wide array of portable artefacts contained

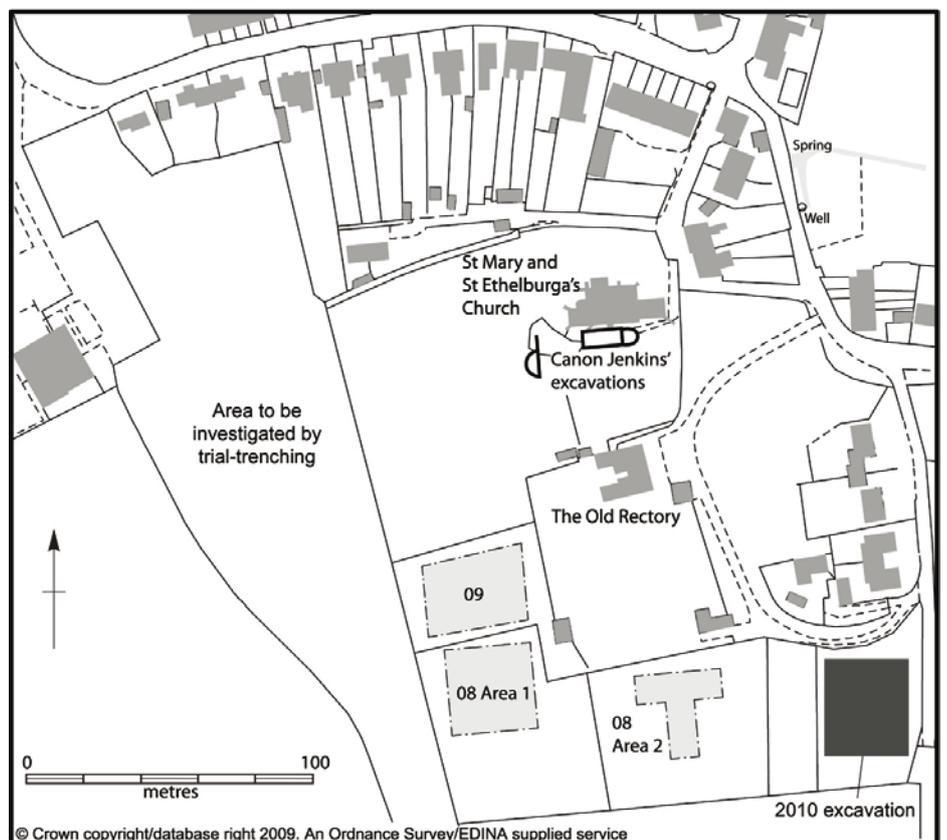


Figure 3 Plan of Lyminge showing location of excavation trenches in relation to the historic core of the village.

in these dumps, including such high-status signatures as glass vessels (Figure 2) and Anglo-Saxon England's first plough coulter (British Archaeology 118, May/June 2011), is of a lavish and economically pre-eminent household.

The post-excavation work on the material remains to be done, but the fact that several of the artefacts categories can be matched in seriated grave assemblages represented in local Kentish cemeteries - Lyminge included (see Brugmann 1999) - holds promise for an unusually refined dating estimate for the duration and termination of the settlement.

### From royal vill to royal monastery

Putting the results of 2010 together with the previous two seasons' excavation demonstrates that Lyminge experienced a settlement shuffle expressed in the abandonment of the 6th-7th century focus and the establishment of a new site to its west - what would emerge, over the course of the 8th and 9th centuries, as an extensive sprawl of domestic occupation to the south of a monastic nucleus centred on an Anglo-Saxon apsidal church of the 'Early Kentish' group unearthed by Canon Jenkins in the 1850s (Taylor 1969) (see Figure 3 for locations). The decisive spatial reconfiguration brought to light by recent excavations is underscored by a suite of transformations defining the character and economy of the 8th-9th century settlement (Figure 4): formal spatial planning, including a hierarchy of ditched boundaries and palisades, used to demarcate proscribed functional zones (domestic/craftworking, agricultural processing and industrial); a diversification in structural repertoire to embrace small domestic cells at one end of the spectrum and large two-storeyed threshing-barns at the other; dense clusters of rock-cut pits involved in the regulated disposal of human and domestic waste; the systematic exploitation of outlying coastal estates to support a diet rich (for some members of the community at least) in marine fish and bivalves.

These and other changes witnessed at Lyminge accord very well with widespread trends in the upper echelons of the Anglo-Saxon settlement hierarchy, as informed by a proliferating corpus of excavated 7th-9th century settlements from eastern England, the majority deriving from sites north of the Thames (see Reynolds 2003). As one of the first sites of Mid-Saxon occupation to have been excavated outside the urban centres of Canterbury and Dover, the message from Lyminge is that Kent was (perhaps unsurprisingly) very much implicated in these broad-scale transitions in the English countryside, sparked by a period



Figure 4 Aerial view of the 2009 excavations (looking north-east with the church and graveyard in the background) showing pit clusters and ditched boundaries from the Mid-Saxon occupation.

of population expansion and economic intensification which early medieval historians have dubbed 'The Long Eighth Century'. What distinguishes Lyminge as a site of supreme archaeological interest nationally, is the fact that the impact of these transformations can be tracked through space and time in a single, reasonably tightly calibrated settlement sequence - a sequence which can gain in-depth historical contextualisation from the Anglo-Saxon charter sources available for Anglo-Saxon Lyminge specifically, and Anglo-Saxon Kent more generally. Through such inter-disciplinary dialogue, Lyminge will provide the first tangible material insights into the 'Christianisation' of a Kentish royal vill and a critical platform for assessing how this ideological transformation might have impacted patterns of daily life.

### Envoi

At the current time the first phase of post-excavation analysis is underway towards the target of publishing a detailed interim report in 2012, supported by web content (primary data, assessment reports, plans and images) downloadable from the University of Reading website (see address below). Further ahead, a new campaign of excavation will be initiated in the village with the aim of recovering more of the 6th-7th century settlement identified in 2010 - watch this space!

[gabor.thomas@reading.ac.uk](mailto:gabor.thomas@reading.ac.uk)  
[www.reading.ac.uk/archaeology/research/Projects/arch\\_Lyminge.aspx](http://www.reading.ac.uk/archaeology/research/Projects/arch_Lyminge.aspx)

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## Membership secretary **Paganism and conversion**



At the AGM in February, JANE WRIGHT (above) stood down after seven years as membership secretary, to be succeeded by committee member Pauline Moore. Jane writes:

As membership secretary I would like to thank you all very much for your patience and support in the years since I took over the responsibility from Jenny Cant in 2004. Your notes, letters and telephone calls have been much appreciated and I feel I know many of you personally. I extend my best wishes to Pauline Moore (below) who is now taking my place.



Professor Martin Carver's second annual round-up of 'what's new in Anglo-Saxon archaeology' was due in the last issue of **Saxon**, but instead it morphed into this year's third Basil Brown lecture, held at the Riverside Theatre in Woodbridge on 7 May: *The Anglo-Saxons and their gods – new thoughts on paganism in England and Scandinavia*.

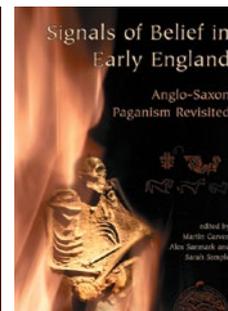
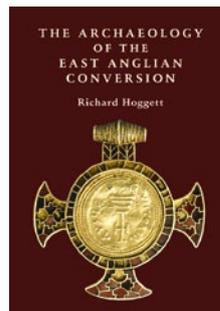
Beginning with a virtual tour of recently published Anglo-Saxon sites previously noticed in **Saxon**, Martin's lecture drew on a volume he has recently co-edited called *Signals of Belief in Early England*, dealing with pagan spirituality in its many manifestations. In all this evidence he often finds "women leading the religious charge" in new ideas, not yet aware that it will lead eventually to Christianity and the single male god.

For the latter, see Richard Hoggett on *The Archaeology of the East Anglian Conversion* (published by Boydell Press at the end of last year), which uses burial evidence particularly to chart the progress of the new faith – a fascinating book that we shall return to.

We hope to receive a text of Martin's lecture for our website, but meanwhile, for anyone who did not manage to get one of his handouts at the lecture, his references are below.



Martin Carver after his lecture



## Tanks in Mound 1

Dear Editor

We were interested to read your account of the post-war re-excavation of Sutton Hoo. You might be interested to know that the army tank-training was stopped by Ted Wright (then a major in the army) who was horrified to find what was happening! He was the finder of Ferriby I in the Humber, the early Bronze Age stitched plank boat – the earliest in northern Europe. We made the half-scale model of it.

Best wishes,  
'Giff' and Joyce

Edwin and Joyce Gifford, Southampton



Edwin Gifford aboard Sae Wylfing.  
Photo Veronica Bennett

### References

#### Early Saxon sites:

Carver, Martin, Catherine Hills and Jonathan Scheschkewitz 2009 *Wasperton, A Roman, British and Anglo-Saxon Community in Central England* (Woodbridge: Boydell)

#### Middle Saxon sites:

Scull, Christopher 2009 *Early Medieval (late 5th – early 8th centuries AD) cemeteries at Boss Hall and Buttermarket, Ipswich, Suffolk* (Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph 27)

Lucy, Sam, Jess Tipper and Alison Dickens 2009 *The Anglo-Saxon Settlement and Cemetery at Bloodmoor Hill, Carlton Colville, Suffolk* (East Anglian Archaeology 131)

Sherlock, Steve and Mark Simmons 2008 'A seventh-century royal cemetery at Street House, North-east Yorkshire, England', *Antiquity* 82 <http://antiquity.ac.uk/projgall/sherlock>

#### Later Saxon sites:

Thomas, Gabor 2010 *The later Anglo-Saxon settlement at Bishopstone: a downland manor in the making* (CBA Research Report 163)

Carver, Martin 2010 *The Birth of a Borough. An archaeological study of Anglo-Saxon Stafford* (Woodbridge: Boydell)

#### Artefacts:

Behr, Charlotte 2010 'New Bracteate finds from early Anglo-Saxon England', *Medieval Archaeology* 54, 34-88

Leahy, Kevin, Roger Bland *et al.* 2011 'The Staffordshire (Ogley Hay) Hoard' *Antiquity* 85, 201-234

#### Ideas:

Carver, Martin, Alex Sanmark and Sarah Semple (eds.) 2010 *Signals of Belief in Early England: Anglo-Saxon Paganism revisited* (Oxford: Oxbow)

Hamerow, Helena, David Hinton and Sally Crawford (eds.) 2011 *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology* (Oxford: OUP)

Williams, Howard 2006 *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain* (Cambridge: CUP)

# Events Diary

## \*Medieval Seminar

Lectures marked with an asterisk are part of the Medieval Seminar convened jointly by Dr Andrew Reynolds of the Institute of Archaeology and Dr Sonja Marzinzik of the British Museum, who kindly invite SHS members to attend. Lectures begin at 17.30 at the Institute of Archaeology, 31-34 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY. smarzinzik@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk

## †Wuffing Education

Events are study days held at National Trust Sutton Hoo (NTSH). They cost £38 and booking is essential on 01394 386498 or cliff@wuffingeducation.co.uk. For more information and the full list of events, visit [www.wuffingeducation.co.uk](http://www.wuffingeducation.co.uk)

## Sunday 11 September, 10.00-16.00 SHS INTERNATIONAL DAY CONFERENCE

### *Sutton Hoo: a Swedish perspective*

Waterfront Building, University Campus Suffolk, Ipswich  
Already 80% full, remaining tickets are available from Robert Allen (01473 728018) at £30 (non-members £32.50, full-time students £27.50)

## †Saturday 24 September, 10.00-16.30 Sutton Hoo and the Dragon

Dr Sam Newton



Photo Tim Stubbings

## Saturday 1 October, 08.00-19.00 In the steps of St Augustine: an SHS Day Excursion to Kent

By coach, leaving Sutton Hoo at 08.00, returning at 19.00. We plan to visit important features of the Canterbury World Heritage Site, such as St Augustine's Abbey and St Martin's Church, finishing with Choral Evensong in Christchurch Cathedral. Full details and an application form are on the flyer enclosed with this issue.

## †Saturday 1 October, 10.00-16.30 A Vibrant Age in a Changing Society: an enquiry into Anglo-Saxon visual culture of the 6th to 8th centuries

Dr Anna Gannon, University of Cambridge

## †Saturday 8 October, 10.00-16.30 Old English Gods and Goddesses Lost and Found

Dr Sam Newton

## \*Wednesday 19 October, 17.30 Viking Slavery

Professor Stefan Brink (the fourth Sir David Wilson Lecture in Medieval Studies)

## †Saturday 22 October, 10.00-16.30 Anglo-Saxon Churches of East Anglia

Dr Rik Hoggett, Norfolk Coastal Heritage

## Sunday 23 October, 10.00-17.00 Writing about the Anglo-Saxons: history and fiction in the age of Sutton Hoo

Local writers Kevin Andrews, Paul Mortimer, Carla Nayland, Steve Pollington, and Pauline M. Sabin Moore. Enquiries to Pauline Moore (01394 382617)  
The Court, National Trust Sutton Hoo (admission free)

## 1 November Main copy deadline for the January issue of Saxon

## †Saturday 5 November, 10.00-16.30 The Old English Warrior-Kings and their regalia

Steve Pollington, Paul Mortimer and Brian Ansell

## \*Tuesday 8 November, 17.30 Who was buried at wics? Community and identity in the 7th century

Professor Chris Scull

## †Saturday 12 November, 10.00-16.30 Sutton Hoo: the other barrows and burials

Dr Sam Newton

## †Saturday 19 November, 10.00-16.30 St Edmund and the last of the Wuffings

Dr Sam Newton

## †Saturday 3 December, 10.00-16.30 The Art of Anglo-Saxon Metalwork

Dr Angela Evans, former Curator of Early Anglo-Saxon Antiquities, British Museum

## † Saturday 10 December, 10.00-16.30 Thinking about 'Things': assembly sites and the history of the English hundreds

Dr John Baker, University of Nottingham, and Dr Stuart Brookes, University College London

## \*Tuesday 17 January, 17.30 Sword and wielder in Early Anglo- Saxon Kent (plus Sutton Hoo)

Sue Brunning

## Sutton Hoo Opening Times & Events

Go to our website, [www.suttonhoo.org](http://www.suttonhoo.org) and click on 'Online Resources' for links to the NTSH site

## The Sutton Hoo Society



[www.suttonhoo.org](http://www.suttonhoo.org)

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