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Saxon

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More work to do at Sutton Hoo

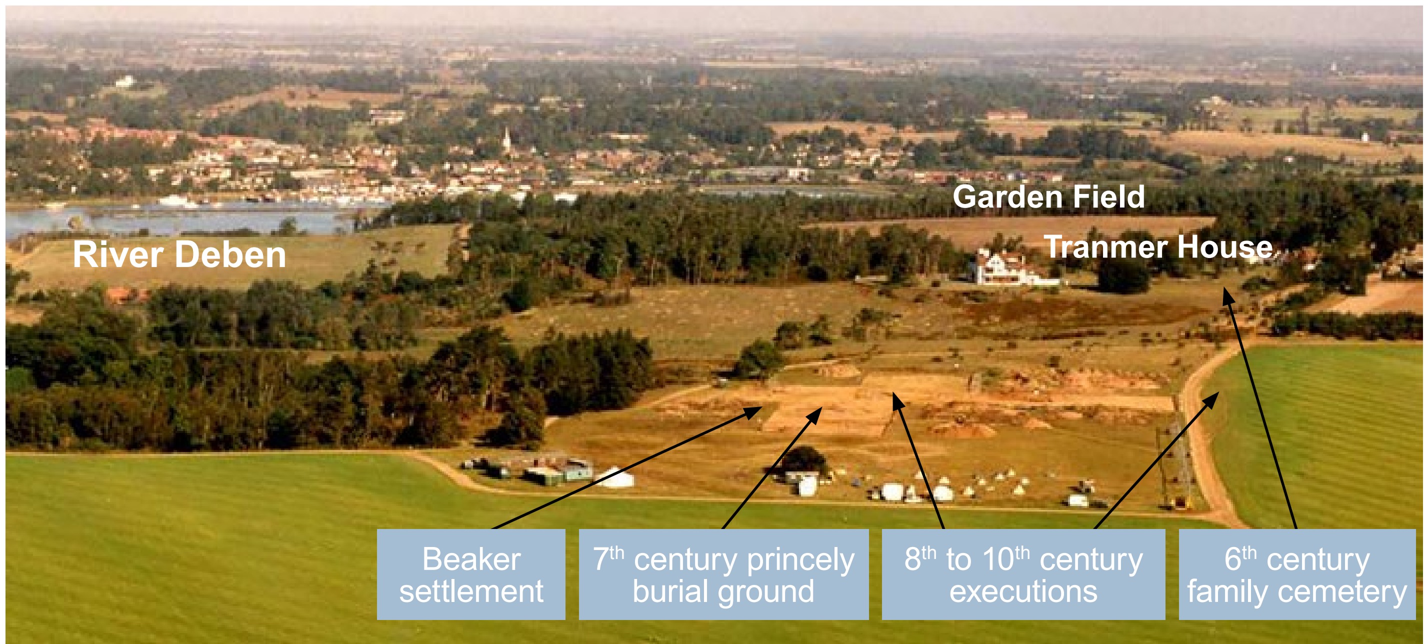


Fig. 1 The Sutton Hoo sites (so far), looking north. Settlements of the Neolithic, Beaker period, Bronze Age and Iron Age occupy the edge of the 30m contour. The 6th century 'Tranmer House' cemetery lies beneath the Visitor Centre and extends into Garden Field. The Princely Burial Ground is shown in the centre of the picture under excavation. The execution cemeteries were found at Mound 5 and on the east edge of the mound burials.

MARTIN CARVER and MADELEINE HUMMLER recently prepared a Research Plan for the National Trust outlining new ideas for exploring the Sutton Hoo Estate, which they outline below. As well as finding out more about the Anglo-Saxons in Sutton Hoo's days of glory they foreground two other flagship missions: to emphasise the long prehistoric story of this slice of England and to develop techniques of investigation and conservation on sandy sites – the medium that still holds (just) much of the world's archaeology.

Sutton Hoo is globally famous for its ship burial which has provided stage props for the European leaders of the 7th century, and for England's first kings. The new display of the finds at the British Museum has emphasised their artistic qualities – which are considerable, but tells us little about the site, its context and its eventful story. For that you must visit Suffolk, down by the River Deben (Fig 1). There are (so far) three Anglo-Saxon cemeteries at Sutton Hoo, each representing a different phase in the early history of England. The 'Tranmer House' burials included 16 cremations and 19 inhumations, some under small mounds and one reusing a Bronze Age mound. The Sutton Hoo Princely burial ground contains 18 burial mounds celebrating early East Anglian aristocrats: six cremations with bronze bowls, playing pieces, horses and dogs (Mounds 3,4,5,6,7, 18), a rider burial with his horse (Mound 17), two grand burials with ships (Mounds 1 and 2), and a lady in a chamber, decked in silver on a couch (Mound 14) – and these are just the ones we know about. All but the last are men, all are princes and some will have been styled kings in their day: Wuffa, Wehha, Tyttla, Raegenhere, Raedwald. Lasting less than a century (c.590-c.650), under the Christian kings of East Anglia the princely burial ground became a dedicated place of execution by hanging (8th to 10th century). So, a local family that aspired to momentary greatness lost power at the conversion and its ancestral mounds were relegated to a killing place for dissidents. Such may have been the story all over England.

This sequence is vivid enough and still unique– but there are other actors and stages which remain elusive. First, it seems probable that there are many more graves - and monumental burial mounds too - all along the 30m contour. The Tranmer House cemetery showed us a small piece of this, and the Norden Map with its 'cocked hats' suggests a landscape of many mounds. The 5th century should be there somewhere. So much for the dead – the living too need their monuments and the recent discoveries in Scandinavia strongly suggest they will be gathered in the vicinity. Gudme in Denmark (3rd-7th century) was a cult centre with votive deposits thrown into bog or water and a series of reception halls. At Uppåkra there was actually a temple building, rising tall on massive posts with a scatter of gold foil plaques that seem to bless marriages. The use of these central places seems to change through time: at Tissö, swords were thrown into the lake at first, then the local lords diverted this handy source of revenue and built shrines for the pilgrims and made them pay. So priest, prince and merchant

took turns at running the show. The burial mounds naturally attract the first attention; but all around on the flat, at Sutton Hoo, as at Rendlesham, as in Scandinavia, halls, temples, shrines and pagan visitor facilities await discovery – and why not? At least it is worth a look.

Slice of England

These are good reasons for extending our investigations beyond the mounds into the broad riverside territory of the Sutton Hoo estate. But there are other, even better ones. As is well known, the Sutton Hoo cemeteries were constructed on top of a prehistoric landscape some 5000 years old (Fig 2). So far we have the bare bones of its development: in the Neolithic the land was settled and trees were cleared and crops were cultivated. These people left a shallow footprint at Sutton Hoo where their main surviving activity was burying pottery in pits around trees. In the early Bronze Age, the Beaker movement swept England depositing its Beakers and dividing the landscape into quadrilateral areas with deep ditches. In the later Bronze Age they grazed the exhausted soil and in the Iron Age they created a new pattern of interconnected small fields accessed by a north-south track we still use. On the face of it, this is a champion slice of farming history, but it is very incomplete. Where are the houses? Where are the villages? Where are the memorials to the dead? More to the point, where are the Roman Britons, the key link between prehistory and the coming of the Angles? This long story of rural England could be so much better, richer and more evocative for visitors already devoted to the long-lived landscapes of the National Trust ethos.

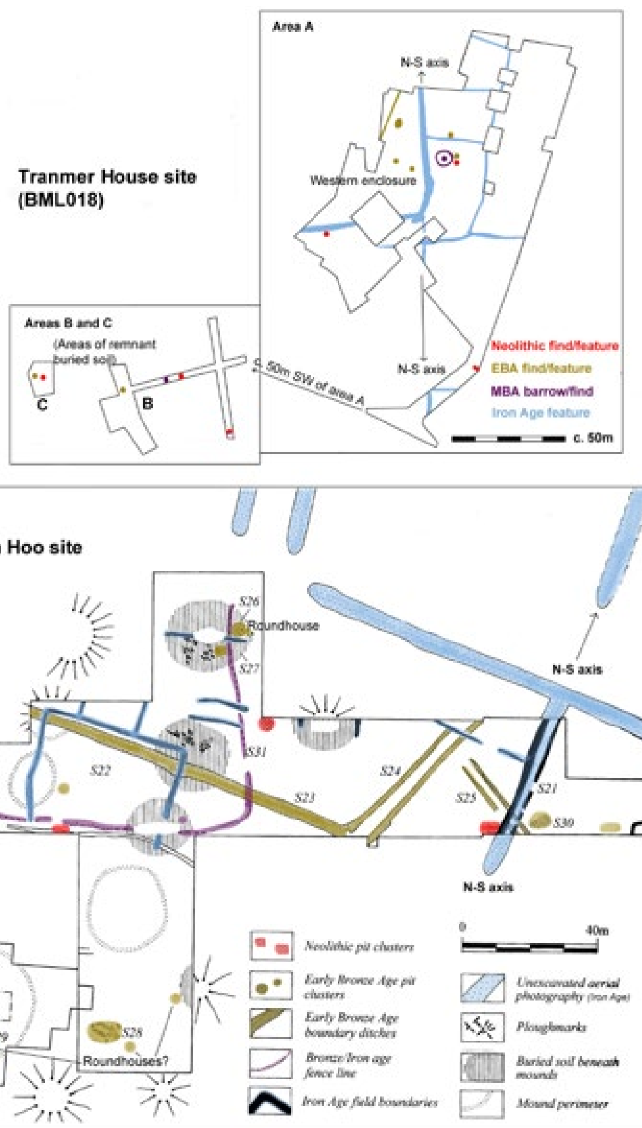


Fig. 2 The Anglo-Saxon cemeteries at Tranmer House and the Sutton Hoo princely burial ground, with the main underlying prehistoric features.

Serving the heritage

Filling out the prehistoric story is a prime demand of the research plan, but it need not be destructive. Most of the archaeological features at Sutton Hoo are imprinted on the surface of the sharp smooth natural sand subsoil: the lines of ditches, the curve of mounds, the blobs of pits and graves, all are darkly marked against the sand like a palimpsest of graffiti on a yellow wall. After eight years of practice on the princely burial ground we are quite good at reading these patterns, and have a good idea what most of them are without digging. What will tell us more are the finds – but at Sutton Hoo the majority of the artefacts are already in the topsoil, pulled up and churned about by centuries of ploughing. Finds from the topsoil plus the pattern on the subsoil equals the lion's share of the archaeological record - without disturbing the precious features that are still intact and buried.

Readers will readily appreciate how important this is for the heritage at large: we want to preserve the past but don't know where it is. Remote sensing techniques continue to develop apace, and the new generation of instruments, such as the Ludwig Bolzman Institute's 16-channel radar, are producing stunning results – detailed maps in which you can see the pilae in the hot room of a Roman villa. Used at the Viking burial mound site of Gokstad in Norway, Jan Bill's state-of-the-art remote mapping has revealed a whole beachside port of the Viking period. But geophysical survey does not produce finds. The strip-and-map technique I advocate not only offers a detailed account of the surface of every feature but a bundle of finds to go with them. Imagine the scene – a promising area like Garden Field (just outside the Visitor Centre) is excavated slowly (and under expert supervision) by an army of volunteers who first came to Sutton Hoo as visitors. They will find hundreds of prehistoric objects, pottery and flint, and the occasional early medieval goody, escaped from a grave - like the gold coin of Honorius and the Byzantine bucket already found by metal-detectorists in the field. Our more meticulous method will find everything, and beneath them the carefully recorded surface of the features they came from. Every year, Sutton Hoo's ancient geography will be gradually unrolled, dated, described and hung on the wall and the webpage to enhance the knowledge of prehistorians, historians and the public.

The proposed exercise not only offers new knowledge, but new ways of acquiring knowledge and keeping it safe for the future. Huge numbers of extant archaeological sites in many countries lie in or over sand, where they are continually eroded by ploughing, wind and water. The sand itself is acidic and abrasive, dissolving bone and damaging objects. Defeating the sands of time is a primary mission of heritage conservation. And we can help. Experiments at Sutton Hoo have already pioneered ground penetrating radar, chemical mapping, stiffening agents for sand and formation processes by which monumental mounds are diminished. Our site has plenty more to offer the business of conservation and heritage management, as well as the deeper knowledge of England's past, a precious asset which management exists to serve.

Martin Carver & Madeleine Hummler *Sutton Hoo Research Plan 2014* (National Trust).

Diss Lady

Dr HELEN GEAKE of the Portable Antiquities Scheme describes her part in the wintery excavation of a rich, woman's grave in South Norfolk

***Fig. 1** The excavation in January of the furnished female burial near Diss (photo Tom Lucking)*

***Fig. 3** The excavation site near Diss: left to right, John Fulcher, Steven Ashley, Helen Geake, Tom Lucking (photo John Rainer).*

Many of you will have heard the news of another richly furnished female burial found in East Anglia, this time in south Norfolk, a few miles north of Diss (Fig. 1). Tom Lucking, the finder, is a student of Landscape History at UEA, and a hobby metal-detectorist. He had already found a few early Anglo-Saxon objects in topsoil on the field, suggesting the presence of a 5th- to 7th-century cemetery here, but a large, unusual signal with no clear edges indicated something different. Tom dug down below the ploughsoil to check that he was not dealing with a heap of buried modern rubbish – and as soon as he saw the rim of the bowl (Fig. 2) he knew that he had encountered an intact grave. He loosely backfilled the hole, marked the area with a peg, and called for help.

The team that then assembled in January of this year included Andrew Rogerson and Steven Ashley of Norfolk's Historic Environment Service, and they asked me to help (Fig. 3). As a member of the Suffolk Archaeological Field Group, Tom had already been collaborating with John Rainer, who runs their geophysics setup, and a magnetometer survey began. Two days of excavation initially revealed a clear grave cut against the chalky clay, and the skull (to the east) and bowl (to the west) were quickly located. It was immediately clear that the bowl was large and unusual – it wasn't a hanging bowl, nor a Coptic bowl.

The next extraordinary find was a gold-and-garnet pendant, clearly of 7th-century date, in the centre of the chest (Figs. 4 and 5). It was enormous, and not like any pendant we had seen before. Clearly inspired by jewelled disc brooches, it had animal interlace made in gold-and-garnet cloisonné, similar to objects from Sutton Hoo and now also familiar from the Staffordshire Hoard.

As soon as the pendant had been lifted, another set of necklace elements appeared further up the chest, with three pendants alternating with two gold wire beads. In the centre was a delicate filigree disc pendant, with four oval perforations giving it a cross shape. To either side was a pendant made from a re-used coin (Fig. 6).

The finding of a coin always galvanises everyone. Here is proper, objective dating evidence – who can decode it first? One of the coins was clearly gold, although not very pure. A photo was e-mailed to the British Museum and an answer came back within minutes – issued by the Frankish king Sigebert III, probably at the Marseilles mint, 636-659 AD. This fitted in pretty well with the date that we had reckoned for the jewelled pendant.

At the foot of the grave, a pottery vessel was found next to the bronze bowl. It was a wheel-thrown biconical bowl, again clearly a Frankish import, and was tipped over on its side. Both the pot and the bronze bowl were extremely soft and fragile, and under the bowl was an area of surviving wood, preserved by the corroding copper.

The body was laid out on its back, with both arms bent. Little could be recovered of the poorly preserved ribs or pelvis. The legs seemed set wide apart, but with the femurs parallel. Although the detail of the pelvis could not be seen, this seemed to us to be caused by post-mortem movement within a void.

As the left femur was being cleaned, a small knife was found at the waist and a row of fifteen small silver rings down the edge of the grave from hip to knee. The rings had small punched annulets on both faces. They were not interlinked but spaced neatly, and they may have been connected by cords, or by stitching to a ribbon or braid. The last finds came from the spoil heap – a tiny iron buckle and three nails, all from the area of the left femur.

The burial may have been contained in a coffin. The position of the body, the wood beneath the bowl and the position of the pot argue for this, but the evidence is not conclusive. The context of the grave is also still elusive. The magnetometry has produced no clear features of Anglo-Saxon date - graves are notoriously difficult for geophysics to find - but the survey will be extended as soon as the harvest allows.

The bronze bowl is indeed as unusual as we first thought. The only parallel so far is the large, flat-bottomed, straight-sided 'pan' from the rich early 7th-century male burial at Broomfield in Essex, now in the British Museum. This bowl is famously peculiar – it's not Byzantine, it's not a hanging bowl, it's not part of a trivet-based bowl. It is still possible that it is of Frankish origin, though, and this would fit well with the evidence of the coins and the pot.

***Fig. 2** The copper alloy bowl (photo Helen Geake)*

Fig. 4 The gold and garnet pendant in the ground (photo Helen Geake)

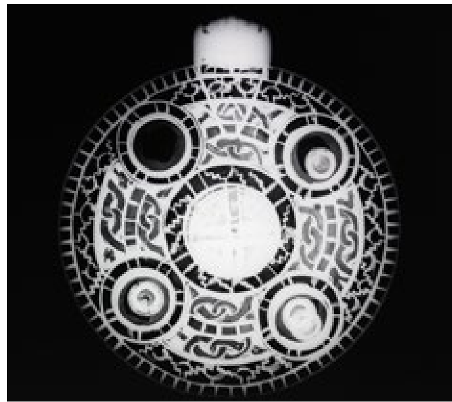


Fig. 5 X-ray of the pendant (Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery)

Fig. 7 The Canterbury pendant, St Dunstans (Canterbury Museums and Galleries)

The large pendant stands out even more. Although there are some well-known lavish 7th-century cross-shaped gold-and-garnet pendants, there are very few circular ones and nothing like this new one. The only close parallel – although far smaller and simpler - is the Canterbury pendant found in 1983 (Fig. 7). Leslie Webster described the Canterbury pendant as 'one of the most complex and magnificent of the splendid series of garnet-inlaid pendants which first emerge as a native adaptation of Mediterranean fashion at the beginning of the seventh century in England' and as 'a composite brooch translated into a pendant'. Our new pendant is both of those things, but unlike the Canterbury pendant with its single central boss, ours has the full five bosses expected on a brooch. The closest composite brooch is perhaps the Kingston 205 brooch, one of the most opulent and beautiful Anglo-Saxon objects ever made.

The story of aristocratic East Anglia in the 7th century is, of course, dominated by Sutton Hoo and its neighbouring sites in south-east Suffolk – famously Ipswich, Rendlesham and Iken, as well as Barber's Point and Butley. We weren't expecting a lady of this status to turn up on the heavy clayland of south Norfolk, which has always been thought of as a marginal area, difficult to farm. In fact, Norfolk doesn't feature much in the story of Anglo-Saxon East Anglia at all until the great flowering of monasteries and 'productive sites' – the rich trading places, fairs and markets - in the middle Anglo-Saxon period, and these focus attention on the fen edge and north-west Norfolk. The lady buried here has the equipment of a top aristocrat with very clear links with Francia and, via the pendant, probably also with Kent. What was she doing here, and what was her relationship with those buried at Sutton Hoo?

This question also throws up the subject of élite female, as opposed to male, burial. The mound cemetery at Sutton Hoo is predominantly male, but in this it is unusual. Spectacularly wealthy male burials – the so-called 'princely' graves – are rare, appearing for a brief moment in the first half of the 7th century and then vanishing. Although there are well-furnished male graves in the mid and late 7th century, rich female burials become much more common, both in cemeteries and as isolated burials. Famous examples include those from Desborough, Swallowcliffe Down, Roundway Down, Galley Low and Cow Low in the Peak District, Street House near Loftus, Westfield Farm near Ely and the recently discovered bed burial at Trumpington.

We do not yet understand why these women were buried with much richer furnishings. Does it represent a real flowering of female status, mirrored by the historically known powerful abbesses and regents such as Hilda, Æthelburh, Æthelthryth and Seaxburh? Or are kings now buried in simple graves in churches, as John Blair argues happened from the 650s onwards? If so, they might have used the funerals of their womenfolk to advertise wealth in the more traditional manner, hedging their bets as to which might best show off their power. New questions arise from every new discovery. But it should be pointed out that metal-detected finds of early Anglo-Saxon graves are becoming a very biased sample. The signal from the bronze bowl was the key to the South Norfolk discovery, because even the gold pendant – a hefty object containing a lot of metal – was not detectable due to the depth of soil. This is common in plough-damaged early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries; the artefacts are generally too small to detect until they are brought right up to within a few inches of the top of the ploughsoil. By that time the grave is almost always completely destroyed, with only the broken remnants of metal objects surviving to show what might have been there. In contrast, although bowls are usually made of very thin metal, their large size makes them far more visible to a metal-detector. This is despite the fact that they are often very poorly preserved, probably due to their shape forming a trap for water, leading to the type of 'acid bath' effect well known from wooden ships and chambers at Sutton Hoo.

Fig. 6 Three more pendants, including one with Frankish coin of Sigebert III probably from the Marseilles mint c.636-659 (bottom left) and a filigree pendant with two beads of gold wire (bottom right)(photo Helen Geake)

Graves containing bronze vessels are thus far more likely than others to be found and excavated intact (watch out for news of another from Warwickshire which was excavated over Easter, and is waiting for a news release soon). We are, it seems, unable to rescue or protect the others unless they are lucky enough to be encountered by development. There is probably an early Anglo-Saxon cemetery in every parish in East Anglia, but most are being ploughed away without any record apart from the metal-detected objects. Excavation would be extremely costly, but without it we are simply letting this evidence of early England slip through our fingers.

Fig. 1 Reconstruction of the Saxon settlement by David Gillingwater.

Barber's Point: a Saxon settlement in the Alde Estuary

by JEZZ MEREDITH, Project Manager, Suffolk Archaeology C.I.C.

Introduction

Barber's Point is located on the north bank of the River Alde. Before December 2013 this site was at the end of a promontory that jutted out towards the river channel but the dramatic tidal surges of December 2013 breached the riverwall defences, turning the site into an island. Investigations at Barber's Point have shown that the site was originally an island and was used during the Neolithic and Bronze Age as an occasional camp. From the 1st century AD it was used for salt manufacture during the early Roman period and from the 6th century became a Saxon settlement associated with a small but intriguing cemetery. The abandonment of this site after that was probably due to Viking incursions during the 9th century and at some point during the medieval or post-medieval periods an immense project of land reclamation drained the saltmarsh behind the site, creating Hazlewood marshes and linking the island of Barber's Point to the north bank of the river. This undertaking, which might have taken hundreds of years to complete, was undone by a short period of exceptional tides that breached the river defences and returned this area to the remarkable and beautiful wetland habitat that is today, managed by Suffolk Wildlife.

The archaeological potential of the site was first recognised in the 19th century when Roman pottery was recovered eroding out on to the foreshore. This led in 1907 to excavations conducted by the Aldeburgh Literary Society who uncovered quantities of Roman pottery, oyster shell and a Roman seal box. A pair of tweezers they found were likely to be of Saxon date but were not recognised as such at the time. In 1994, with the riverwall collapsing and the bank eroding badly, a new collection of pottery and other finds was made by Anna West for her BSc dissertation. Her examination of this assemblage confirmed the presence of Saxon archaeology by recognising Ipswich ware and imported Merovingian pottery.

With the establishment of the Aldeburgh and District Local History Society (ADLHS), Richard Newman and his team organised a series of test holes dug in 2002 and 2003 to the north of the riverwall and established that archaeological deposits survived here. A geophysical survey of the main area of the site by David and Aline Black indicated that there were significant enclosure ditches surrounded the site. After applying for Heritage Lottery Funding open-area research excavations were conducted from 2004. The excavations were run as training digs and Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service (now Suffolk Archaeology) were invited to direct the site, supervise volunteers and ensure that proper records were made.

Initially thought to be a Roman site, it soon became apparent that despite the huge quantities of Roman artefacts from across the site, the majority of the significant features encountered (such as the large ditches) were of Saxon date. Significantly ten graves had been recognised and a final season of excavations in 2013 was planned to uncover the rest of the cemetery. The 2013 dig was generously funded by Touching the Tide (a Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership Scheme).

Roman Barber's Point

After a long period of sporadic occupation during the prehistoric period (with evidence from the Neolithic and Bronze Age), the site saw intensive use during the Roman period. From the late 1st to the early 3rd centuries AD huge quantities of wheel-thrown, greyware pottery were discarded on site. In the excavation area over 20,000 individual Roman potsherds were recovered, weighing 118kg. Recent analysis of this material has identified that most of the greyware sherds belong to slack-shouldered jars. Large storage jars,

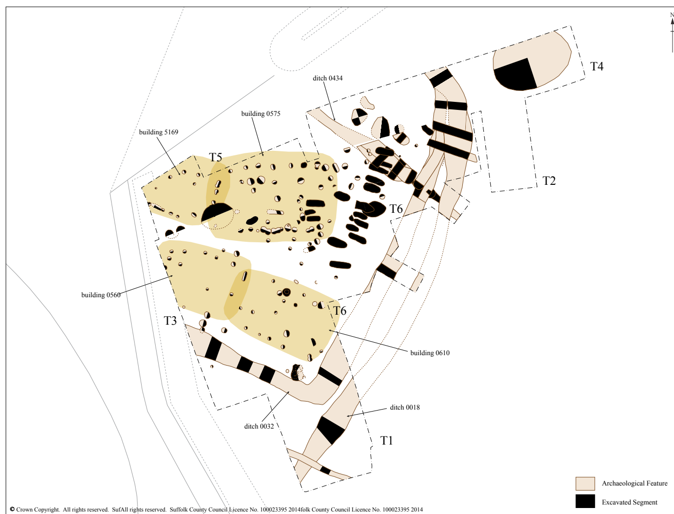


Fig. 2 *The Barber's Point excavations 2004, -06, -10, -13 in black, showing ditches and four buildings (© Crown copyright).*

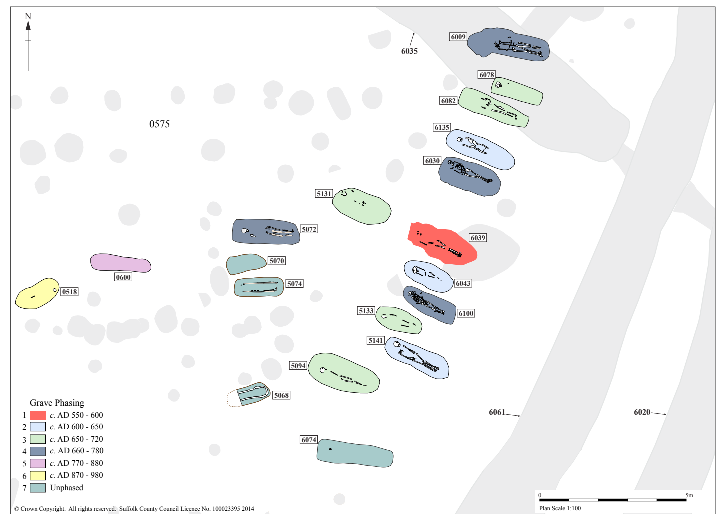


Fig. 3 *Plan of 6th–10th century graves: the founding grave of the 'casket girl' in red (© Crown copyright).*

typical of Roman settlement, are absent however from the assemblage, suggesting that Barber's Point was perhaps only seasonally occupied.

The seasonal occupation of the site was probably associated with salt-working as seen by the huge assemblage of recovered briquetage (pieces of the large ceramic evaporation trays used in the process, Fig. 4). Vast numbers of briquetage fragments have been found, numbering 6,400 individual pieces and weighing a staggering 168kg. This is the largest briquetage assemblage to have been documented in Suffolk.

Interestingly only fragments of the trays themselves have been found at Barber's Point with only very occasional pinch pieces, props and other bits of hearth furniture associated with the evaporation process being recovered. It seems highly likely therefore that the main focus of production was down at the river's edge and any traces of this activity have probably been obliterated by river erosion. The discovery of mineral sources of salt in Cheshire and rising sea-levels (peaking at around AD 400) probably led to the abandonment of the site.

Fig. 4 *Fragments of ceramic Roman evaporation trays or 'briquetage' (Suffolk Archaeology CIC).*

The Anglo-Saxon occupation

After sea-levels had dropped, the island at Barber's Point probably became inhabitable again from the 6th century. New occupants dug a series of large rectilinear enclosure ditches to protect or define the site, post-hole buildings were erected and the dead were buried in graves (Figs. 1-3). It is almost certain that at least half the Saxon site has been lost to river erosion on the western side. This is clearly seen by the ditches that enclosed the site; these run along the east side of the site but disappear as they turn westwards towards the river.

Not all evidence from the river's edge has been destroyed however. Recently surveyed alignments of posts (site FRS 047) have been radiocarbon dated to the 7th and 8th centuries AD, making them contemporary with the main terrestrial site c.80m to the east. A major alignment to the south (site FRS 058) was further revealed after the scouring effect of the 2013 tidal surge. These timbers are as yet undated.

Three separate post-hole buildings appear to be aligned to and were respecting the enclosure ditches and were orientated north-west to south-east (structures 0560, 0610 and 5169). Structure 0575 was a larger building, more 'square' in plan and on a slightly different alignment from the other buildings, running west to east. As it was not on the same axis as the main enclosure ditches it is likely that this building belonged to a later phase from the other post-hole structures.

There was great excitement during the 2006 excavations when two human burials were found within the footprint of this structure. The 2010 dig revealed further graves, suggesting that at least five of these burials were either within or aligned to building 0575 raising speculation that this was a church or chapel. The final season of excavation in 2013 was designed to uncover the rest of the cemetery. But rather than finding further burials associated with our 'church', an unusual linear arrangement of graves was discovered, parallel with the enclosure ditch. Radiocarbon dating of human bone has indicated that at least four individuals were buried in the late 6th and early 7th centuries but with the majority of the burials dated to c.AD 650 - 800. This raises the likelihood that the cemetery straddles both pagan and Christian eras.

The founding burial and the Saxon cemetery

In total nineteen graves have been identified and this is believed to be the full extent of the cemetery. Of the nineteen, fifteen have been radiocarbon dated (one had too little bone to be dated and three had no skeletal remains surviving). The radiocarbon dating has suggested that the cemetery started in c.AD 590 and lasted for possibly 200 years. Professor John Hines of Cardiff University is currently modelling the radiocarbon dates and the phase scheme represented in Fig. 3 will probably have to be reviewed in the light of his findings.

The founding grave, c.AD 590

Grave 6039 was an irregularly shaped, slightly oval cut in which was placed a young individual of about 16 years of age (Fig. 5). Although the skeletal remains were too fragmentary to sex this individual, the associated artefacts might suggest that the occupant was female. At the foot of this grave was placed a wooden box which contained a fascinating array of objects (Figs. 6 and 7). A high precision radiocarbon date from this individual suggests a date of AD 550 to 591 (at 68.2% probability) and, given the associated finds it seems likely that she was buried towards the end of this date range.

The box and its contents (finds group 6083) have been looked at by a range of specialists including Ian Riddler (Saxon small finds), Esther Cameron (analysis

Fig. 5 How the burial might have looked by David Gillingwater.

Fig. 6 Reconstruction of the casket and its contents by David Gillingwater.

Fig. 7 Casket contents as found: panther cowrie shell, spindle whorl, terret ring, and iron key (Suffolk Archaeology CIC).

of wood remains) and Sue Harrington (analysis of textile remains). Traces of wood and textile were preserved in the corrosion of the iron fittings of the box. The following is a summary of their findings:

- The box was made of field maple boards between 11 and 15mm thick with the backboard slightly thicker (c.18mm) to accommodate the hinge fittings. The box was held together by a number of iron fittings including five rectangular strips, ten U-shaped clamps, eleven nails, three split loops (possibly forming part of the hinge) and a rectangular mount (possibly a hasp).
- A number of the items from within the box might have been worn from the waist by an adult woman. These objects include a large T-shaped iron key, a stone spindle whorl and a short bar of iron around which yarn had been wound (possibly part of a sewing kit). Six wire hoops of varying sizes probably represent a chatelaine, the largest of which was threaded with a bead each of amber and glass.
- A collection of unusual, rare and possibly symbolic items were also placed in the box. The largest and perhaps most unusual was a panther cowrie shell (originally from the Red Sea or Indian Ocean). Other objects included a pierced echinoid fossil, an irregular lump of amber, two fragments of Roman glass and a miniature Iron Age terret ring
- At least four different types of cloth have been identified with at least one of these having fine pleats or folds. These could represent garments or soft furnishings.

The placement of the box and its objects within the first and founding grave must have had deep significance but it is very difficult for us to gauge the resonances and symbolic consequences of placing these objects within the ground. There are at least three competing theories:

- The 'keepsakes'. If these were the remains of a young woman then it is likely many of these objects could have been either hers to wear or would have been hers if she had reached maturity. The other unusual items might have been keepsakes that might have belonged to the individual or be placed there as gifts by the mourners.
- 'Amulets and curing stones'. A theory developed by Audrey Meaney in the 1980s recognised that some individuals during the Anglo-Saxon period were buried with 'purse' or 'bag groups' (occasionally in boxes) that contained strange or exotic items which could include cowries, lumps of amber, fossils and antiques such as were found in our box. Meaney interpreted these as signs that the interred individual was perhaps revered in the community as a healer or as a 'cunning woman'.
- Votive offering. Very little is known about the religious beliefs of the pagan Anglo-Saxons of the 5th to 7th centuries. There is very little convincing evidence for shrines, temples or cult centres but there is a great deal of investment in the burial rite which was probably of a highly charged and symbolic nature. Sally Crawford believes that the placing of objects in graves during this period is about the burying of votive offerings in the ground. The objects in the box are perhaps not just to do with the girl buried there but have been brought together by the whole community with the purpose of initiating the new cemetery.

Within a generation of the founder being buried, a further three graves were dug, one of these belonging to a child of 5 years, around whose neck was suspended a Roman bronze coin (a radiate oc c.AD 260-296, possibly of Claudius II). From c.AD 650 more graves were placed along the line, some filling in spaces between earlier graves, others at the end of the alignment. Later graves (from the 8th century) were placed further westwards and were on a stricter west to east alignment. It is these later graves that appear to be associated with the possible chapel (structure 0575).

After the Saxons

The first Viking attacks on East Anglia were in the mid 9th century and the monastery at Iken (on the other side of the river) is thought to have been abandoned soon afterwards. The River Alde and its shores had become a potentially dangerous and hostile place. Interestingly, if there had been a church at Barber's Point, it is possible that it was relocated to St Mary Hazlewood 2.5km to the north. The church keeping its connection to Barber's Point by the reference within the name to Hazlewood.

At some point, probably starting in the medieval period and continuing into the post-medieval the land between the island of Barber's Point and the north bank of the river was reclaimed and consolidated to form dry land for fields and pasture. Small quantities of medieval pottery have been found spread across the site.

The dramatic tidal surges of December 2013 breached the river wall that had been protecting Hazlewood marshes behind, undoing the enormous project of land reclamation of the last thousand years and returning the area to what it might have been like in the Saxon period and before.

Acknowledgements

Richard Newman initiated this project and was the driving force behind all four seasons of excavation. It was with great sadness that we heard of his death in 2014; this research is dedicated to his memory. Many thanks are due to Tony Bone and the Aldeburgh and District Local History Society who organised the project, to Bill Jenman and Touching the Tide who funded the 2013 excavations and to Suffolk Wildlife who allowed us to dig on their land. Many colleagues from Suffolk Archaeology CIC (previously Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service) have helped with this project as have many independent finds specialists and researchers.

The booklet *Life and Death at Barber's Point: a Saxon cemetery on the cusp of Christianity* by Jezz Meredith and Bill Jenman, £2.50 (includes p&p) is available from Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB, Dock Lane, Melton, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 1PE.

Excavation continues at Lyminge

Professor Gabor Thomas of the University of Reading delivered this year's Basil Brown Lecture at the Riverside Theatre in Woodbridge on Saturday 23 May, under the title *Places of Power and the Making of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms: New Archaeological Perspectives from Lyminge, Kent.* This was the dig that the Society visited last August, and where, as Gabor announced, the excavators will be returning for a month this summer.

'A Yeavering of Kent': an initial reconstruction of the halls at Lyminge (University of Reading).

The earliest levels of an archaeological site are usually uncovered last, because they are beneath the later ones, which have generally destroyed them to a greater or lesser degree. Lyminge is different. The early Anglo-Saxon centre of the 5th to 7th centuries was excavated in 2010 and 2013-14, undamaged by later building because the heart of the Middle Saxon settlement had been rebuilt up a nearby hill at the end of the present-day village. Those Middle Saxon developments had been excavated first, in 2008-10 around the parish church. The series of digs leave Lyminge with complete archaeological sequences for both the Early Saxon and the Middle Saxon centuries.

Gabor Thomas reviewed the course of the excavations, but concentrated on the ones we saw on our visit last August. In the first half of the 7th century, a suite of overlapping halls was constructed, each larger than the one before, from 21 metres long up to possibly as much as 30 metres: 'a Yeavering of Kent'. The excavators were able to identify three zones: domestic, characterised by small timber units surrounded by pitted yards; agricultural, with a threshing barn; and a separate industrial zone with evidence of ironworking. Diet is now better understood, with marine fish only noticeable in the 8th and 9th centuries when sheep and poultry also increased.

The earliest monastic foundations are now seen as just a phase in the development of this Anglo-Saxon 'central place', with the building of the great hall complex bringing changes in the rhythms of daily life, and new technologies associated with the central processing of estate surplus like wool and iron. Together they illuminate the social dynamics behind the period of the Anglo-Saxon conversion.

Gabor's work this summer will concentrate on the mysterious 'blob', the 12 x 14 m 'sub-circular anomaly', which we saw last summer already excavated down to a single layer of coarse flint, and which is covering a further three or four metres of expectedly richly productive fill. In a separate development, Gabor has funding to develop a network of archaeologists working on comparable sites to exchange ideas about the formation of the earliest Anglo-Saxon kingdoms: wait for the website!

Gabor Thomas on site at Lyminge last August (Nigel Maslin).

The excavations at Lyminge from the air (University of Reading).

Society visits West Stow and Mildenhall Museum

The Society's first outing of the year was on Saturday 13 June, when members drove themselves first to West Stow and then to the museum in Mildenhall. PAULINE MOORE describes a drizzly but fascinating day.

Guide Alan Baxter admires the newly constructed version of The Oldest House (photos Michèle Abson).

Our party was greeted at the West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village by Alan Baxter, former manager of the site. He showed us the introductory video and gave us a glimpse of the museum, where many of us especially enjoyed the cases showing how various groups of objects had been found together. He then led us out to the open space leading to the village, showing the significance of the position of the site. We admired their large stone, carved by Brian Ansell, which shows the aspects of this place in its context.

The early settlers probably approached from the direction of the Wash, and then up the River Lark to this place, where there was water, space to keep pigs, sheep and fowl, and useful woodland – including ash, hazel and oak. Another site would soon develop only a little further beyond: these people were pioneers.

Alan explained how different these houses were from the longhouses they had occupied in their homeland. These houses are smaller rectangles. We first entered a small Sunken Featured Building (SFB), where we immediately became aware of the problems of a damp, sandy, unstable floor, low beams, low, sloping roof, light only from a small doorway with awkward steps, and a size precluding the use of a fire: impractical as storage or anything but a one-man workspace.

The Oldest House showed the timber framework of a building, secured to stout posts (with some knowledge of bracing) and with wood floorboards pegged to a firm surround (though they can still flex considerably). The beams are higher and the area of accessible space far greater than in the SFB. The doorway is spacious and reinforced; it is not possible to know if they had windows or not. Archaeologists understand this structure from finding postholes, dropped objects sandwiched below the floorboards, and timbers of

Questions for Dr Jo Caruth at Mildenhall Museum.

burnt-out houses. It was hard to maintain a hearth. Even if fire is contained within a stout, hardwood box, a dangerous, hot ash-cone can form, fall below and ignite the wooden building.

Alan Baxter, our guide, pointed to the looms with their weights – these could be taken outside into daylight, and stored against the inner walls of the building. This was a good work-space. Windows would have been useful, one thinks.

A Dwelling house had a central, floored space with either a platform along a wall on which to lay bedding for all the occupants (Viking style) or a box-bed at floor-level (Beowulf-style). One house might have had up to 8-10 occupants.

In both groups of houses identified at West Stow there is one Hall to about six or seven buildings, not all of which were dwellings. Each group in a village may have comprised thirty people. That is exactly what the size of the Hall suggests.

The Hall is a communal space with a central hearth beneath a high roof, two doorways (one at the front, one at the side). The carpentry shows their skill in strongly bracing a large building. A great seat was displayed, for the king or for a scop (minstrel), space for benches and trestles, and room to lay down bedding for guests after a feast.

From about 450, the early settlers made a comfortable living by developing farming, using the river and the woodland. Their thatching might be straw or hazel twigs, and they bonded it tightly to the beams with withies, or ropes of twisted straw. Here there is no evidence of metal-working, though they had, of course, the usual brooches, buckles, clasps, knives and swords.

Alan Baxter reminded us of how there was an early desire to make Anglo-Saxon Suffolk an obvious feature of our heritage: combining West Stow, Sutton Hoo and Gippeswick (Ipswich) with their development and connections). Perhaps this is something which we should be aware of. We share a common, developed history of great importance. The knowledge emerging from Rendlesham should reinforce this. Perhaps the Sutton Hoo Society has a role here?

After our rather damp picnics, we all moved on to the charming Mildenhall Museum. Society member Dr Jo Caruth gave each of our groups a very interesting, illustrated talk on the archaeology at nearby Lakenheath, where a warrior was buried with his horse - in the same grave, amid a large group of burials, and near two other burial sites. Radio-carbon-dating has placed the burial in the late 400s. We were lucky to be shown the sword and very fragile scabbard from the grave. One striking revelation was to learn that small children can be found, even alongside some warriors in the same burial. Jo Caruth showed the placing of men, women and children – mostly east-west and pre-Christian. It became obvious how Anglo-Saxon settlement was growing.

The Museum is a little treasure-house of things from the Mesolithic, Iron and Bronze Ages, via the Anglo-Saxon (with our warrior and his horse), to small rooms and cases revealing how the town of Mildenhall has developed over the centuries. There is a fascinating section on the RAF connection, and a proud display about the UK-Australia air-race. Some of the little shop-fronts and rooms reminded me poignantly of the contents of my grandparents' house.

We are very grateful to Mike Argent and Nan Waterfall for organising and booking these visits; to Alan and Jo for sharing their knowledge so enthusiastically; to the people at West Stow and at Mildenhall Museum for coping with us on a rather soggy day – and for the very welcome cuppas!

Braving the drizzle at West Stow.

When was Beowulf written?

PAULINE MOORE reviews a new collection of essays on an old problem

***The Dating of Beowulf: a Reassessment,* (ed.) Leonard Neidorf (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer) [Anglo-Saxon Studies 24]**

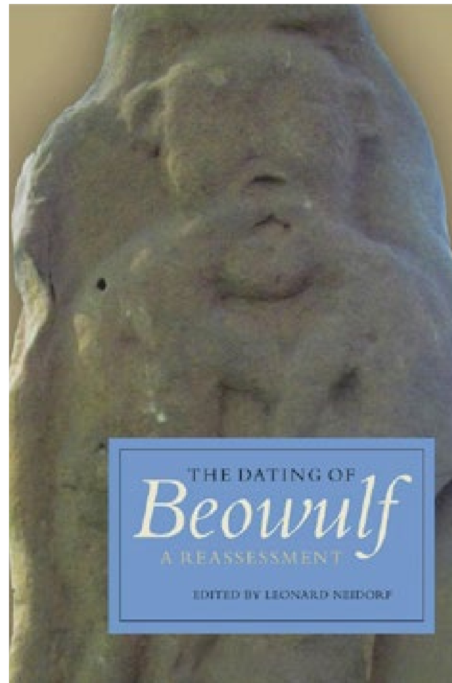
In his introduction, Neidorf comments: 'Scholarship on the dating of *Beowulf* is markedly uneven in quality: alongside sober and thoughtful argumentation there has been a great deal of improbable hypothesizing about the author of the poem or the milieu in which it was composed... This introduction to the dating of *Beowulf* controversy examines the changing standards of evidence, methodology, and argumentation... particularly in the last 30 years.'

The essays assembled here 'reassess the chronological implications of a wide variety of evidence, including … the linguistic, metrical, semantic, onomatic, paleological, cultural, historical and theological.'

Looking closely at the Language History, R. D. Fulk concludes that, 'If *Beowulf* is not to be thought an early composition, advocates of a late date even now have before them the task of otherwise accounting for a considerable body of linguistic evidence in a manner that linguists might find persuasive.'

Leonard Neidorf, in his essay, looks at the actual MS of *Beowulf*: the presence of transcription errors throughout the manuscript reveals that it is a copy of a copy, 'written out perhaps at a vast remove from the authorial original' and gives examples of scribal errors. He also looks at the four references to Hygelac's 'disastrous raid into Merovingian territory... known in England before the middle of the C8th,' and notes that Hygelac is presented as a king of the Geats (Beowulf's own people): the author is drawing on an oral English account rather than a (later) written Frankish source. Neidorf is prepared to look at *Widsith* as a short heroic-legendary poem, relevant to *Beowulf*, and even the Franks Casket as 'a runic and artistic vernacular rendering of heroic-legendary narrative.' The casket is dated around 700 AD. He also looks at names, royal genealogies and the legend of Weland the Smith. 'Felix of Crowland reports that Guthlac listened to heroic-legendary poetry in C7th Mercia.' An early Anglian king listed Scyld and Beow as ancestors. "*If* [my emphasis] the *Beowulf* poet composed in Mercia around the year 700, it is probable that he would readily have found an audience deeply familiar with such traditions.'

There follow detailed and scholarly essays on Names (maybe preserved in memory by the Anglians who crossed the sea); on Metrical Dating and Traditional Diction (very specialised) probably affected by later transcription; a close look at Scyld Scefing; a fascinating consideration of History and Fiction and the Reference to Beowulf's Frisian Raid; M. Drout (et al.) argue that, from 1981,



writers propounded the idea that *Beowulf* is undateable, and that it was not worth studying as history. But 'escaping the surly bonds of history also had the unsalubrious effect of sending *Beowulf* scholarship into some blind alleys and dead ends...'

J. Harris looks at discussions about the whereabouts of Heorot (Hrothgar's hall). T. D. Hill questions whether Beowulf was a Christian: 'I would like to think that the elaborate concern of the poet for the salvation of ancient heroes adds some weight to the early side of the scales in this matter.' R. Pascual looks at the monsters and decides that the poet used the words *scucca* and *thyrs* in the way he did because they still referred to material monsters exclusively, 'before those two words acquired their restricted, spiritual meanings.' G. Clark looks minutely at transliteration errors, where single Anglo-Saxon letters make for confusion and concludes that, 'the archetype of *Beowulf* was written before 750': we have 'the imperfections of a C11th MS.' In his Afterword, A. J. Frantzen sums up the scholarship: 'The literary knowledge emerging from this work will help us see the Anglo-Saxon world anew, a project all *Beowulf* scholars endorse.'

What all these essayists have in common is a desire to look again at Tolkien's assertion that the original poem is early in date, and to consider this as possible, backed up by various and informed research to the manuscript, the history and the culture.

Not a book for the faint-hearted. I wish I had a degree in linguistics as well as in English Literature. I am left, however, encouraged by what I was taught in the very early 1960's, that the original poet was early, maybe even a *scop*, and it is the writing down of his words that has led to problems for scholars.

We can all enjoy the legends of King Arthur, even if we do not believe them all. Go back to *Beowulf* original - or the excellent Seamus Heaney version - reheartened. For an equally erudite, and possibly more approachable book on the subject, see SHS member Dr Sam Newton's *The Origins of Beowulf and the Pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993).

Two other new books from Boydell & Brewer may be of interest: *The Anglo-Saxon Chancery* by Ben Snook and *Trees in the Religions of Early Medieval England* by Michael Bintley.

Boydell & Brewer are offering Society members a 25% discount (+ p&p) on their recent titles (2014/2015) mentioned in **Saxon**. Order online at www.boydellandbrewer.com – just enter the code 15233 when prompted during checkout – or call 01394 610 600. (The discount code will be changed after the end of the year.) Alternatively send a cheque to Boydell & Brewer Ltd, PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF. P&P is £3 in the UK and £7.50 per book to the rest of Europe. Please e-mail marketing@boydell.co.uk in case of any queries.

Martin Atkinson, 1968-2015

On Wednesday evening, 6 May, a tree was planted in a beautiful spot in sight of the river at Sutton Hoo in memory of Martin Atkinson, who sadly died in March after a severe illness. Described as a man who loved trees and water, Martin spent twenty-seven years with the National Trust, latterly as General Manager not only of Sutton Hoo but also of Flatford Mill, Dunwich Heath and Orfordness.

Martin Atkinson enthusing over the replica belt buckle at 'Mrs Pretty's Garden Party' in July last year, with Bryony Abbott (centre) and local MP Dr Therese Coffey.

Writing in the Trust's *Sutton Hoo News*, Society member Angus Wainwright, the East of England Regional Archaeologist for the National Trust, recalled, "Martin was one of those who took me under his wing when I came east from my home in the Chiltern Hills to the strange flat lands of East Anglia. Very much the Essex man he introduced me to two of the county's gems. Firstly Hatfield Forest where he was very much part of the centuries-old cycle of coppicing and pollarding, gaining a physical understanding of the reality of life in the past which I could only read about in books. Then at Northey Island where he seemed at home in the harsh environment of the Essex marshes and in fact the deeper he sunk into the marshes the happier he was! We spent merry hours searching the mudflats for lost boat wrecks, me following hopefully, in his muddy foot prints. When Martin arrived at Sutton Hoo he was excited by this new challenge which combined his enthusiasm for traditional ships, craftsmanship and history. He remarked that if it was the last thing he did he would make the new exhibition worthy of the international significance of the place and an exhibition which communicated this significance and Martin's enthusiasm to its many visitors. It is a tragedy that he will never see the conclusion of his project and so it is now up to the National Trust to realise his ambitions for the place."

Justin Scully, National Trust Assistant Director of Operations for the East of England, remembered Martin as very much a man of activity and life, often arriving on a unicycle and championing mountain biking at Danbury Commons in Essex. He was responsible for improving the condition of two of Suffolk's finest timbered buildings, Paycocke's House in Coggeshall (a merchant's house of about 1600) and Thorington Hall in Stoke by Nayland (a farmhouse of about 1500) as well as for land acquisitions at Flatford Mill and Dunwich Heath. Justin remembered his humour and gentleness, 'someone who was a good, good person [who] loved the places and people he worked with, [doing] his absolute best for them with no sense of politics malice or subterfuge...' Equally, the Sutton Hoo Society also found in Martin a sympathetic ear and a practically minded partner whom we shall miss him very much indeed.

Yvonne Harvey, 1928-2014

Fifty years ago this summer, the late Yvonne Harvey, then Yvonne Crossman, arrived at Sutton Hoo to reopen the ship trench in Mound1 for the re-excavation by Rupert Bruce-Mitford. From the library of the Society of Antiquaries in the 1950s, she had moved to the Department of Manuscripts at the British Museum, then in 1964 to its Department of British and Medieval Antiquities where Dr Bruce-Mitford was Keeper.

Yvonne Harvey (then Crossman) exploring the stern of the Sutton Hoo ship in August 1965.

Yvonne and Professor Paul Harvey at Sutton Hoo, 20 March 2012.

"We didn't do much in '65 as far as I remember, but we did set it up so that we could start in '66," she explained to the Society's treasurer, Jonathan Abson, in a recorded interview two years ago. "There was the surveying to do, there was all this recording and excavating a little bit and taking a sample of the soil around." In theory, at that point she was in charge of the dig as Rupert Bruce-Mitford's assistant. "In point of fact there was a great deal of what you might call input from Bruce-Mitford, and he had very definite ideas about what he was going to do and I just had to fit in."

In 1966, "The main object I think was me excavating the boat, and obviously the top two or three strakes had been lost with all the army activity in the field [in 1939]. There was still an enormous amount left, and the prow – although that had been very much threatened – the shape of the boat was still very clear... I think [Rupert] expected it to be worse... Being aware of all the army activity and so forth, I think he just hoped there would be enough to make it worthwhile working over, and there was."

"I was in charge, I was supposed to be in charge, but Valerie of course was a very valuable assistant." This was Valerie Fenwick, who went on to specialise in marine archaeology and wrote the sections on the ship for *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*.

In 1968, Yvonne Crossman married her British Museum colleague Paul Harvey, moving to Southampton and Durham where he became Professor of Medieval History in 1978. Yvonne began cataloguing more than five thousand coins from the Anglo-Saxon and Norman mint at Winchester, which involved researching collections worldwide, particularly in Scandinavia. Published by Oxford University Press in 2012, *The Winchester Mint and Coins and Related Finds from the Excavations of 1961-71* was the work of a lifetime.

That same year, Yvonne revisited Sutton Hoo for a reunion of the 1960s diggers, though declining strength confined her to a view from the edge of the site. An appreciation in the online newsletter of the Society of Antiquaries (SALon 324, 4 Aug 2014, www.sal.org.uk) recalled Yvonne's love of opera and ballet, her many friendships and her enthusiastic entertaining at home in London or Durham.

Events Diary

Wednesday 19 August
Behind the Scenes at the Ashmolean Museum with Dr Eleanor Standley
(Assistant Keeper in Medieval Archaeology)
Sutton Hoo Society members' day trip to Oxford, leaving NT Sutton Hoo at 07.45

- Private tour, Highlights of the Ashmolean, including the Alfred Jewel and treasures of the Italian Renaissance, Pre-Raphaelite paintings, Chinese jade and ceramics, Samurai armour and the finest collection of pre-dynastic Egyptian artefacts outside Cairo
- Special handling session, Treasures of the Ashmolean's Medieval Collection
- Lunch at Balliol College

MEMBERS CAN ONLY BOOK BY POST, USING THE FLYER ENCLOSED IN THIS ISSUE OF SAXON

Summer weekends at NT Sutton Hoo:

25-26 July *The Return of the King*
Wulfheodenas re-enactment with Paul Mortimer as Raedwald

15-16 August *Sutton Hoo Garden Fete*
1930s Living History

22-23 August *Beasts of Battle*
Birds of Prey, SHS talks and family trails based on the Anglo-Saxon bestiary

29-31 August *Combat and Kingdoms*
Ealdfaeder re-enactment, with archery

19-20 September *NTSH Festival of History*

Wuffing Education Study Days
The Court, NT Sutton Hoo,

Study Days are £36 each, which includes a full day of lectures, access to the NT site, parking, coffee and tea throughout the day, and access to the National Trust exhibition.

Anglo-Saxon topics include:
26 Sept *Early Merovingian Gaul (c.450-650)* Prof. Guy Halsall (University of York)
3 Oct *English Medieval Queenship* Dr Rosemary Horrox (University of Cambridge)
10 Oct *Celtic, Pictish & Anglo-Saxon Visual Culture (c.550-850)* Prof. Michelle Brown (University of London)
17 Oct *The Battle of Assundún* *(18 Oct 1016)* Dr Sam Newton (Independent Scholar)
21 Nov *Sutton Hoo: the other barrows and burials* Dr Sam Newton (Independent Scholar)

Prior booking essential: see website for full details www.wuffingeducation.co.uk
or contact Cliff on 01394 386498
or email cliff@wuffingeducation.co.uk

Marc Brewster on top of Scafell.

Marc Brewster takes over as Membership Secretary

After four years as membership secretary, Pauline Moore has handed over her duties to committee member Marc Brewster, who sends this message:

"Hello to all Sutton Hoo Society members from your new membership secretary. My name is Marc and I have been a member of the society for almost 10 years. I am also a tour guide and you may have seen me at Sutton Hoo, most likely at weekends. If you see me around, then please come over and speak with me. I should like to meet as many members as possible and will hopefully see some of you on the trips we have planned. In the meantime, if you have any questions for me, then please get in touch using the contact details in Saxon and I shall do my best to answer.

"Finally, I hope you will join me in thanking Pauline Moore for all the effort and energy she has put in over the years. There is a lot of hard work done behind the scenes and I shall endeavour to 'fill the shoes' she leaves behind."

I look forward to meeting you all soon.
Marc

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