

SAXON



The Sutton Hoo Society Excursion to Norwich Castle Museum on 8th June 2018

Pictured above: The Winfarthing Pendant (from a high-status, seventh-century female burial, recently acquired by NCM). Diameter: 70mm.

© Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery

One of the benefits of Sutton Hoo Society membership is the opportunity to go 'Behind the Scenes' and our recent visit to Norwich Castle Museum did not disappoint. SHS committee member Megan Milan had arranged for us to meet Senior

Curator Dr Tim Pestell and we set off on a lovely summer's day, by coach from Sutton Hoo through the beautiful East Anglian countryside.

Norwich Castle is mentioned in the Domesday Book and its Norman keep can be seen from all over the city centre. When we arrived, we had a sense of just how high it is, as our group had to make its way up the steep hill - the exterior lift being

out of order at the time - the climb was worthwhile. Norwich Museum moved to the medieval castle in the late nineteenth century and houses some



The Binham Bracteate Hoard (the largest hoard of sixth-century gold in England).

© Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery wonderful collections, including displays of Anglo-Saxon and Viking objects, Ancient Egyptian, and Roman artefacts, there is an exhibition on Boudicca and the Iceni and in the Colman Art Gallery, a fine selection of Dutch and British paintings are displayed, notably the largest collection in public ownership of works by artists from the Norwich school.

Megan had split us up into two smaller groups for our sessions with Tim Pestell and we had the chance to explore the galleries at our leisure and have a bite to eat in the museum café before or after our meeting with the curator.

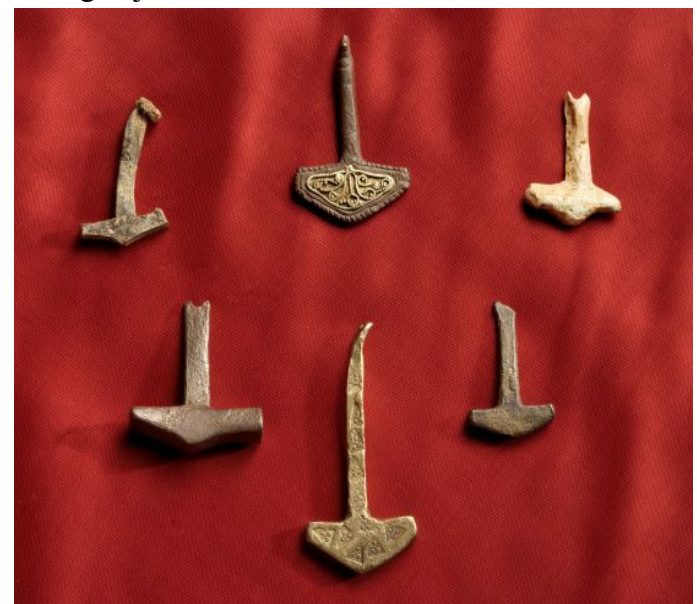
We were privileged to see and handle a

selection of objects that Tim had picked out for us, mainly from the Anglo-Saxon and Viking collections, some newly acquired and not yet out on display to the public. We started with a charming and



The first of the Binham bracteates found.

© Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery iconic boar figurine dating from the Iron Age which we were able to examine closely and then examples of the different types of Anglo-Saxon brooches and a tiny Thor's hammer made of silver, typical of many Viking objects found in Norfolk.



Collection of Viking Thor's Hammers (NCM has the largest collection in Britain).

© Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery



Runic tweezers from Baconsthorpe (which read: rede se þe cuinne beæu þas rune awrat, a grammatically perfect and stylistically elegant statement: Read whoso may. Beaw inscribed these runes.) Norwich Castle has the largest collection of runic-inscribed objects outside the British Museum.

© Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery

We heard how the county is rich in both the quality and quantity of its archaeology; with the number of finds above average for the UK (with approximately 16,000 last year*) and this led to Norfolk playing a key role in the national initiative to establish the Portable Antiquities Scheme. Tim recognises that many finds are increasingly being discovered by metal detectorists and this activity is growing in popularity. He has been developing links with local detecting groups to spread the word and he tries to visit groups and stay in contact with them whenever he can. **

Tim is selective about the purchases and acquisitions he makes for the museum collections, which is understandable given the large numbers of finds each year. By taking a long-term view of archaeology, Tim is aiming to build for the future, acquiring objects of interest that will provide a valuable resource for study.

The artefacts in the Anglo-Saxon galleries at the museum are beautifully displayed alongside the informative interpretation boards and two artefacts stand out for me. The recently acquired and fabulous jewellery of the Winfarthing woman is stunning and features two high-status pendants made from gold coins of a Frankish king, Sigebert III, who ruled from AD 634 to 656.

In the same gallery but in total contrast to the aristocratic Winfarthing woman sits the plain but enigmatic figurine of Spong Hill man. Seeing him up close was a special moment! His mournful little face is slightly asymmetrical and his seated position with his head in his hands captures a moment in his life that we can all empathise with today.

We are grateful to Dr Tim Pestell for welcoming the Sutton Hoo Society and for sharing his knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm with us. It was an enjoyable and illuminating visit and thanks go to Megan Milan for her organisation skills❖

Bryony Abbott, Sutton Hoo Society member

***Editor's comment:** Norfolk has about 10% of Treasure cases from England, 115 last year. It used to be about 20% but this has reduced as Treasure reporting has improved from elsewhere in the UK.

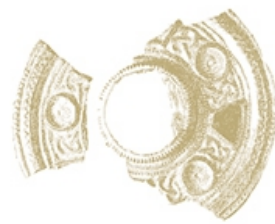


The reverse of a seventh-century gold pendant that we saw during the handling session. Diameter: 23.5mm. It was created from a Merovingian (French rulers) copy of a Byzantine coin and was found by metal detectorists in a field at North Elmham, near Dereham. An imitation of a gold solidus of emperor Maurice Tiberius (AD 582-602), the coin was probably made into a pendant around AD 600-620, a suspension loop with longitudinal ribs having been soldered to its edge.

© Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery

****Editor's comments:** Metal detecting has the potential to make a significant contribution to archaeology, as has been demonstrated by the systematic metal detecting sweep at Rendlesham. Moreover, the recording of metal detected finds helps advance knowledge and particularly aids archaeologists in recognising productive sites, worthy of further investigation. Since the early 1970s, Norfolk has been recording finds and developing good relationships with metal detectorists. The Portable Antiquities Scheme [PAS] encourages the recording of archaeological objects.

Code of Practice for Responsible Metal Detecting (finds.org.uk/getinvolved/guides/codeofpractice).



Portable
Antiquities
Scheme

www.finds.org.uk



THE SUTTON HOO SOCIETY is on Facebook



Mercie Lack ARPS's Colour Image of the Surveying of the Sutton Hoo Ship

by Eric Houlder LRPS, SHS Member, former Editor of *Heritage Photography*, the journal of the RPS Archaeology & Heritage Group, and supervisor on the Sutton Hoo site 1967-70.

Many readers today are unaware of the difficulties faced by pre-digital colour photographers with their analogue equipment and materials. This article attempts to place in context an error of framing committed by Mercie Lack ARPS and explain why the image was not destroyed. It also shows how that initial error unwittingly implied that the original transparency had been erroneously viewed the wrong way around.

I have always been an admirer of the work of

both Mercie Lack ARPS and her friend and colleague Barbara Wagstaff ARPS. Both were Associates of the Royal Photographic Society and pioneers of the use of colour photography on excavations. I once made the mistake of assuming (in the precursor of *Heritage Photography*) that the pair were the first to use tri-pack reversal (colour slide) film in British archaeology, but was gently rebuked by Raleigh Radford, who had actually evaluated it before they did.



A typical pre-war camera outfit (on a modern mini-tripod). Note the outfit case which holds half a dozen loaded dark slides containing glass plates, a double thickness black focusing cloth, and of course the camera. The camera has a primitive reflective viewfinder attached as an afterthought, but it is clearly intended to be used on a tripod with the black cloth over the photographer's head as he/she attempts to focus the dim, upside-down image on the ground glass screen at the rear. © Eric Houlder LRPS.

This certainly does not detract from the reputation the pair gained for their work at Sutton Hoo in 1939. Initially, it was their monochrome work which was lauded, and it was not until well into the 1960s that it was realised that they had worked in colour too. By this time the transparencies had been stored for almost three decades, and some slight fading was already evident.

Archaeological Photography in the 1920s & '30s

New innovations often take a long time to come into use, and this was particularly the case with the precision 35mm camera in archaeology. Most practitioners at the time used wooden plate cameras, the most advanced of which could be adapted to utilize large roll film. At the time, there was a great deal of prejudice against the new smaller precision instruments; this actually survived well into the 1960s. The smaller cameras required more stringent

techniques of exposure and processing, and those unwilling to master these were largely responsible for the prejudice. It is against this background that we must judge the achievements of the two Sutton Hoo photographers.



An early Leica similar to the models used by our heroines. Using this, the practitioner can move around selecting up to 36 views before re-loading, though it does have a tripod screw socket on the base for more considered formal records. Note that this particular model has a post-war Russian lens attached! © J Erik Scollay.

Equipment and Materials

The Misses Lack and Wagstaff were devotees of the Leica, the first practical 35mm camera using standard movie film in removable cassettes. The original Leica was developed by Oscar Barnack and put into production in 1925. Until the adoption of the Leica, and later other precision 35mm instruments, colour photography had only been possible using lenticular and dot-réseau coatings on glass plates and larger films, but this was impossibly intrusive on the small film area (24 x 36mm) of 35mm. The situation was saved by Kodak and Agfa, working totally independently of each other. In 1936 Kodak introduced Kodachrome, a slide film based on three microscopically thin layers of dye emulsion, each

sensitive to a different secondary colour: cyan, magenta and yellow. Development was complex and could only be undertaken by the manufacturers. The following year Agfa introduced Agfacolor [*sic*] based on roughly the same principle but with rather less complex processing. The new films produced transparencies for projection which were brilliant and did much to convert many photographers to 35mm cameras, which confusingly were dubbed 'miniature' by contemporary experts.

Early Kodachrome cost twelve shillings and sixpence (62.5p) for eighteen transparencies including processing, whilst Agfacolor was six shillings (30p) for thirty-six, also including processing. To put this into context my late father, a skilled mechanic, earned rather less than £4 per week at this time. Each film had its own characteristics: Kodachrome's rendering was brash and comparatively saturated, whilst Agfa's was more subdued and realistic. However, Kodak deserved the kudos for inventing the card slide mount of 2"x2" proportions which subsequently made the projected colour slide so popular. Cost considerations, as well as colour rendering, appear to have influenced the two Associates of the RPS to use the Agfa film at Sutton Hoo.

The sensitivity or speed was only 8 ASA (ISO), giving a sunlight exposure of 1/30 sec at f8, or more realistically, 1/60 at f5.6. Either is barely hand-holdable without severe danger of camera shake. Essaying such an exposure on my state of the art digital instrument, a large red wobbly hand appears in the viewfinder! In 1939, there was no auto

exposure, autofocus, or shake reduction. Everything had to be assessed by eye and brain, using a printed table of exposures or a primitive calculator, though the rangefinder of the Leica did make focusing precise.

Correcting Errors

Both films produced images consisting of dyes, so were prone to fading over time. With no negative involved, each slide was unique, and could only be duplicated by re-photographing the original onto special, lower contrast, duplicating film. Until the advent of digital imaging, this was the only way to save important colour images.

Slight errors of framing such as incorrect horizons could only be corrected by twisting the slide in its mount or even using a slightly smaller opaque mask skewed inside the mount. If this could not be undertaken, for various reasons, the alternatives were either to discard the slide or keep it as a unique, though flawed, record. As a Royal Photographic Society Distinction holder, the temptation to destroy what is intrinsically a low-standard photograph is almost overwhelming. Ironically, my modern camera will display an artificial horizon at the touch of a button; I never use it as sixty years' experience makes it redundant.

Analysing the image in Question

To fully understand the discussion, it would be as well for readers to open their last issue – No. 66 – of SAXON, on page seven. The first reaction is to exclaim at a never-before-seen original colour picture of the Sutton Hoo Ship. However, it then becomes apparent that the colours of the image have

faded as the shadows imply full sunlight. What is not immediately apparent are the left and right sides, which show black-bordered film rebate (the edge of the emulsion which does not contain an image). To an experienced photographer who used colour reversal film up to the dominance of digital, the total absence of sprocket holes in the rebate implies that the original frame of film has been copied, probably by projection, on to sheet film.

Examining the top of the image a fundamental flaw is obvious; the horizon is tilted down to the left. In addition, the green bracken is very subdued, though A.M. Carlsson wrote of Agfacolor (Carlsson A.M., 'New Look at an Old Favourite,' in *Colour Photography* Sept/Oct 1965, p 517) that 'greens were often rendered rather brown and dull.' The only correction available for the framing fault is to straighten the horizon. Having spent a lot of time at Sutton Hoo, and taken many colour slides, I know that this particular horizon is basically level. Today, it is a relatively easy task to scan an image and straighten it in post-processing software (I use *Affinity Photo*, by Serif) though it does mean sacrificing slices of the left and right edges to maintain the strict rectangular picture. Using a slightly smaller card mask to simulate the process enables us to appreciate the image as intended. One

can also appreciate Mercie Lack's dilemma; she probably stumbled or tripped and accidentally released the shutter before the image was correctly framed. No deleting in 1939! Does she keep a unique record, or destroy evidence of a careless moment? I believe that she did the right thing.

Returning to the original, skewed image, the first impression is of a list to port - left. This is how the notion was given that the slide had been flipped, or viewed the wrong way around, as the original excavators, Brown and Phillips – both of whom I have met - describe a distinct starboard list. Technically speaking, slides are always viewed through the transparent backing to correct the natural tendency of the camera to produce true mirror images.

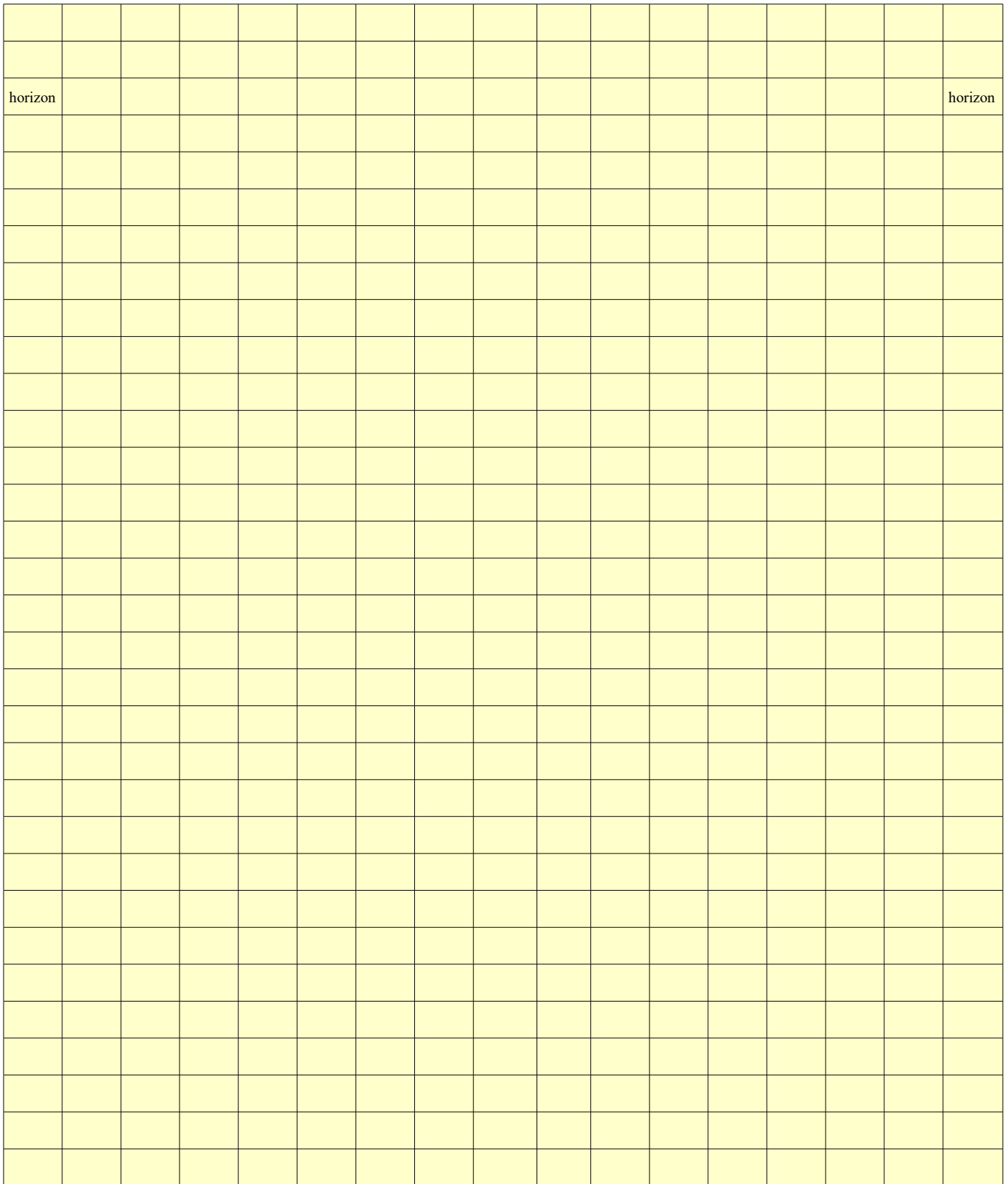
However, by correcting the horizon and viewing the levelled image, it is clear that the list is to starboard. Ergo – the picture is reproduced the right way round. Further corroboration may be sought by comparing the corrected image against others, for example, the many monochrome pictures extant, or indeed my own Agfacolor transparencies of the ship in 1967. The one illustrated demonstrates that the horizon beyond the ship's bows is indeed level, confirming that it can be used to rectify Mercie Lack ARPS's picture ❖

Additional Biographical details

Eric Houlder LRPS has been involved in archaeological site photography since 1957, and amongst other subjects photographed the Towton Battlefield skeletons and the St Aidan's sunken ships. He was a founder member of the Archaeology Group of the Royal Photographic Society. Sir Mortimer Wheeler (the Group's patron) once said of one of Eric's aerial images exhibited there, that it was the best aerial image he had ever seen. The pilot was the celebrated Derrick Riley. Eric took early retirement from education in 1997 as a result of acute hearing loss (leaning out of an aeroplane may have had something to do with this!) and became the Photographer to the Wood Hall Archaeological Trust, and later the St Aidan's Sunken Ships project. At 78 he now lectures extensively, advises site photographers, writes articles on a variety of related subjects, and loves to see his images in print in newspapers and magazines. erichoulder@gmail.com



The author's image of the final stages of work on the Sutton Hoo ship, July 1967. At the time he was using Agfacolor CT18 film, the direct descendant of Mercie Lack's 8 ASA film, though two-and-a-half stops faster. The camera was one of the first Japanese Single-lens Reflex models to be imported, an Aires Penta with reflex viewing. By chance, this is taken from almost the same viewpoint as Mercie Lack's image of twenty-eight years before, and confirms a level horizon beyond the bows. © Eric Houlder LRPS.



Surveying the shape of the ship 1939. Photo: Mercie Lack. © The Trustees of the British Museum
Cf. p.7, SAXON issue no.66. Here the image is flipped and levelled to the visible horizon.
IMAGE ONLY APPEARS IN PRINTED VERSIONS UNDER RESTRICTED LICENCE

PEREGRINATIO (St. Fursey 597 - 650 AD.)**(i) At Burgh Castle**

‘Winter, and still the people come
to sit and stare over the narrow sea,
talk shyly, and leave, sensing the virtues
they brought here, unknowingly.
At sunset, tumult, a hundred thousand
sooty corvids, grackling down last light
to blacken the shore; a raucous mob, out
for blood carrion, clamorous for war,
Out of the west, cruel Penda,
slaughterer of Christian kings, burns
every byre and chapel, gains ground,
harrowing our settlements, mile on mile,
and I, Fursey the stammerer, healer,
teller of dreams, to whom wonders have been
attributed, must shoulder the anvil
of reputation, and chance the sea.’

(ii) Fiollan & Ultan, his Brothers

‘Thirty years ago we watched
Brendan the Navigator cross-mark
his pale brow; smooth chrism of ash
and water from a Corrib Spring.
We clerked and copied at Clonfert,
helped him build the colony at Rathmat;
until celebrity and the cloy of fame
drove us, far-faring to relinquish all
ease, kinship and comfort. Together,
in a leathern skiff, sore backs, hands
blistered, we crossed over, and came at last
to Cnobheresburg, here on the Saxon Shore.
Ten years now, in this bleak ruin,
he listens, interprets the cyphers
of a green world; draws us in, to measure
the course and bearing of atonement.’

(iii) The Fishwife

‘Good days, I bring him sprats, dabs
or spouters, to take with barley bread. He
eats small, has little appetite; passes the night
in a hive of stone and willow; a dark place
and cold. He owns few books to speak of
and no coin at all. They say he’s never seen
the inside of a Roman church, yet still folk
come to watch with him, over the unending

surge of the sea, sharing what is unkind
about their lives. Some are sickened by that
facial scar. I was nurse to his nine-day fever,
poulticed the fistula with soft sea-clay;
‘Away with the angels’ he said he’d been,
but I won him back, at last, as if through fire.
Listening to those who make long journeys
for his company, you begin to wonder.’

(iv) Alighieri

‘That year, 1309, I, Dante, scrivener
and outcast, racked with ambition, cursed
by solitude, my poet’s heart undone with
bitter love, went north by Avignon.
In Paris I haunted the Parcheminerie,
Aquinas, Boethius, Pythagoras, I drank
those ancient vintages; took in so many
travellers’ tales, and from such fragments
determined to invent, in song, a vast
and triple-towered church, a gothic dream,
harmonious and terrible; and the setting out?
As to the start of it, I should confess that
walking by the Marne one thundery day,
we took shelter at Lagny, and there the modest
Prior gave his account of the Vision of Fursey
Peregrinatio, first of the wandering saints.’

FOOTNOTE *Fursey’s visions, which he was said to have experienced throughout his life, became widely known through accounts by the Venerable Bede in his Ecclesiastical History of the English People (8th century), which also contains the earliest life of Fursey, written by an anonymous contemporary monk; and by Aelfric Grammaticus (10th century). The visions included demoniac assaults, conversations with angels, divinations, and glimpses of heaven and hell; the accounts of visions influenced medieval vision literature, of which they are considered a prototype.*

‘Peregrinatio’ by Mike Bannister was first published in *The Long Poem Magazine*, and more recently in *‘Late Poems 2007-2016’* Orphean Press.

Peter Van Geersdaele 1933 – 2018

Peter van Geersdaele had had a formal training in conservation¹ before joining the V&A and then the British Museum as a young conservator. His first job was to make a fig leaf to hide the god Apollo's dignity². He enjoyed the work and everyone thought highly of the quality of the fig leaf and he suddenly began to realise that work could also be fun.

Fame came when one day Rupert Bruce Mitford said he wanted to take an impression of a 90-foot long sandy ship. Peter would be responsible for designing the method and taking an impression of the Sutton Hoo Ship to produce a light and strong moulding to enable further research in London. The mould would provide the impression to make a fibreglass positive and provide a record of what remained before the original was completely investigated and destroyed³. A somewhat rueful Peter remarked that this would be by far the biggest copy ever taken in the field and Bruce Mitford added to the problem by insisting that there could be no damage whatsoever to the sandy shape of the ship.

Clearly, the biggest difficulty was that the mould material was likely to adhere to the rivets and the sand and destroy the very thing the archaeologists were still hoping to investigate. After experiments using diluted Araldite® and then polyurethane to consolidate the sand failed, a simple and cheap method with plaster of Paris and paper towelling and squares of polythene and modelling clay to protect the individual rivets provided the answer. The impression was taken in sections about two- to three-foot square and a few inches thick, the biggest problems being the speed at which the plaster hardened and the system of dams, largely polythene tubing filled with sand, needed to keep the plaster in place on the sloping sides.

In the end, they used six and a half tons of plaster of Paris and as Mound 1 is half a mile from Sutton Hoo House, every drop of water used had to

be ferried there in tanks.

The work took three weeks and three days with Peter and assistant Nigel Williams (the conservator who undertook the second and successful reassembly of King Raedwald's helmet) regularly up their elbows in plaster. On one memorable occasion, one of the Copinger-Hill twins fed him cake by hand while he was working.

Once in London, the individual plaster squares had to be securely propped up at the right angle to make the fibreglass positive, which involved all manner of extempore fittings and the purchase of a large number of small oil drums as props. 'I got a really good deal there' said Peter putting the phone down - when the bill came the price was per item not per load.



Peter van Geersdaele and Nigel Williams making a mould. Photo given to The Sutton Hoo Society archive by van Geersdaele. © Sutton Hoo Society 2011

Peter, who lived in Woodbridge, was a regular visitor at Sutton Hoo and unless otherwise acknowledged the information here is taken from an interview with him in 2010. The interview and transcription are filed at Suffolk Record Office, reference Deposit IP18295 ❖

1. Hammersmith Technical College, 1946 – 1949
And the Institute of Archaeology 1966-1969
2. Victoria and Albert Museum [V&A], 1949 - 1951
3. Studies in Conservation, 14, pp177-182

Jonathan Abson, Sutton Hoo Society member



WUFFINGS EDUCATION STUDY DAYS

October 6th - The Horse in Early Anglo-Saxon England with Chris Fern (Heritage Consultant, University of York).

From the very beginning of Anglo-Saxon culture, the importance of the horse is signified by the names of the legendary warrior-founders of the English-speaking peoples in Britain, Hengest and Horsa. Equine imagery is also prominent in early Anglo-Saxon art. Added to this is considerable archaeological evidence for horse sacrifice in both cremation and inhumation burials of the 5th to 7th centuries, often with highly ornate tack. At Suffolk Punch Trust, Hollesley

October 13th - 1066 Year Zero? With Dr Sam Newton (Wuffing Education).

For many people, the Battle of Hastings marks the beginning of English history. On the eve of its 952nd anniversary, we shall reconsider this view in the context of the contemporary sources for the history of England in the 11th century. At Suffolk Punch Trust, Hollesley

October 20th - New Thoughts on Old Swords: The Sword in Early England from the 5th to 7th centuries. Paul Mortimer (Independent Scholar).

Much of the evidence for Anglo-Saxon swords derives from the excavation of graves and many ideas about them have been based on that. But does a sword always indicate 'high-status', or are patterned sword-blades really rare? We will consider these and related questions along with new ways of thinking about them. At Suffolk Punch Trust, Hollesley

November 3rd - Beowulf, Sutton Hoo, and the Wuffings with Dr Sam Newton (Wuffing Education).

An introduction to the Old English epic of Beowulf and its implications for our understanding of Sutton Hoo and the culture of the Wuffings of East Anglia. We shall see how its splendid language brings to life the bare bones of the archaeology and how the latter authenticates the golden world of the poem. At Suffolk Punch Trust, Hollesley

November 17th - Raising the Dead: The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon Death and Burial with Dr Richard Hoggett (Heritage Consultant).

Burials constitute a large part of the archaeological record from Anglo-Saxon England, and this study-day uses the rich East Anglian burial record to explore the range of funeral rites. Subjects to be covered include cremation, inhumation, the use of grave-goods, and the impact of Christianity. The day will be illustrated with examples which will include recent and unpublished excavations. At Suffolk Punch Trust, Hollesley.

November 24th - Reconstructing 13th-century Society and Landscape: the Bishop of Ely's Fenland Estates with Dr Sue Oosthuizen (University of Cambridge).

The Ely Coucher Book is a record of the Bishop of Ely's vast fenland estates in 1249-50, so comprehensive it was too fat to stand and had instead to lie down as if asleep (from the French *coucher*, 'to sleep'). Because the same questions were asked on each manor, and the work of collection, recording and analysis was undertaken in a single phase within a consistent framework by a centrally co-ordinated team, it provides a detailed portrait of many aspects of daily life across a large medieval region. From this great book, we can reconstruct everyday lives across that mid-13th-century landscape to try to understand 'what really happened in that land of mystery which we call the past'. At Suffolk Punch Trust, Hollesley. NEARLY FULL.

December 1st - Castles, Moats, and Feudal Symbolism in Medieval Suffolk with Edward Martin (Retired Archaeologist & Independent Scholar).

Castles – and the less monumental but related moated sites – are powerful and evocative symbols of the medieval feudal system. We shall examine the history and development of those in Suffolk, exploring both their physical and symbolic values. At Suffolk Punch Trust, Hollesley.

December 8th - The Old English Yuletide Feast with Dr Sam Newton (Wuffing Education).

Rediscover the magic of Christmas with an exploration of the significance of the midwinter festival in early England and how it was celebrated. This will include a look at the Old English calendar, which reveals how the pre-Christian year was structured, and how it was transformed into the Christian year, in the light of early medieval art, poetry, and archaeology. At Suffolk Punch Trust, Hollesley.

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SOCIETY**

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