

In this issue: Martin Carver, Chris Fern, Sam Newton, Angus Wainwright

SAXON

No. 62

Published by The Sutton Hoo Society

January 2016



Reconstruction of cremation 8 by Kate Morton (After Fern 2015 © Suffolk County Council Archaeology Service), and (below left) the hanging bowl the cremated bone was buried in (After Fern 2015 © Trustees of the British Museum)

'Folk' to dynasty: the 2000 cemetery and Sutton Hoo

The final report on the '2000 Cemetery' at Sutton Hoo has just been published by *East Anglian Archaeology*, and it gives substance to the possibility of a real lineal connection with the barrow cemetery. CHRIS FERN, the author of the report, summarises his findings below, updating his preliminary account five years ago in *Saxon 52*.

The discovery of a second cemetery at Sutton Hoo, in 2000, was greeted with excitement and not a little speculation. Suffolk County Council Archaeology Service excavated the site ahead of development of the National Trust Visitor Centre. One popular archaeology magazine hailed it as the finding of the 'parents and grandparents of the East Anglian kings' (*British Archaeology* 54). Without exaggeration, it is true to say that the physical and ritual landscape of Sutton

Hoo was changed for good. No longer was the richest burial-ground of early England alone on its Suffolk promontory, overlooking the River Deben, it had a potential precursor, within sight and a short walk away. The secrets of its buried population have since been unlocked by the painstaking work of British Museum conservators and a cohort of specialists, and have just been published by *East Anglian Archaeology* (vol. 155), marking a new chapter in Sutton Hoo studies.

The graves excavated close to the Edwardian Tranmer House complex represent part of the population of a 'folk' community of 6th century England. They are very different in their scale to the graves under barrows, 500m to the south, with their buried ships and gold regalia, considered the tombs of the royal dynasty of East Anglia. In total, nineteen inhumations (body burials) and thirteen cremations were recorded at the new site. The inhumations included burials of boys and men laid out with weaponry, and women interred in their finery, including beads and brooches. The bodies survived as ghostly casts and stains,

as was observed in graves at Sutton Hoo. The acidic soil had consumed almost all the bone, except that burnt but fragmented in the cremation graves. Simple pots, some decorated, had been used to contain most of the cremated bone.

An exception was the cremated remains of a woman placed in a bronze hanging bowl (cremation 8). This is a type of imported vessel of Celtic origin, of which examples have been found widely in high-status graves of the 7th century, with three in Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo. However, the Tranmer House grave was to prove an unusually early context. A burnt amethyst bead from a necklace found in the bowl, another exotic item, is now one of the earliest from Europe. Moreover, the grave offered a rare parallel for the cremations buried in metal vessels at the 'royal' cemetery.

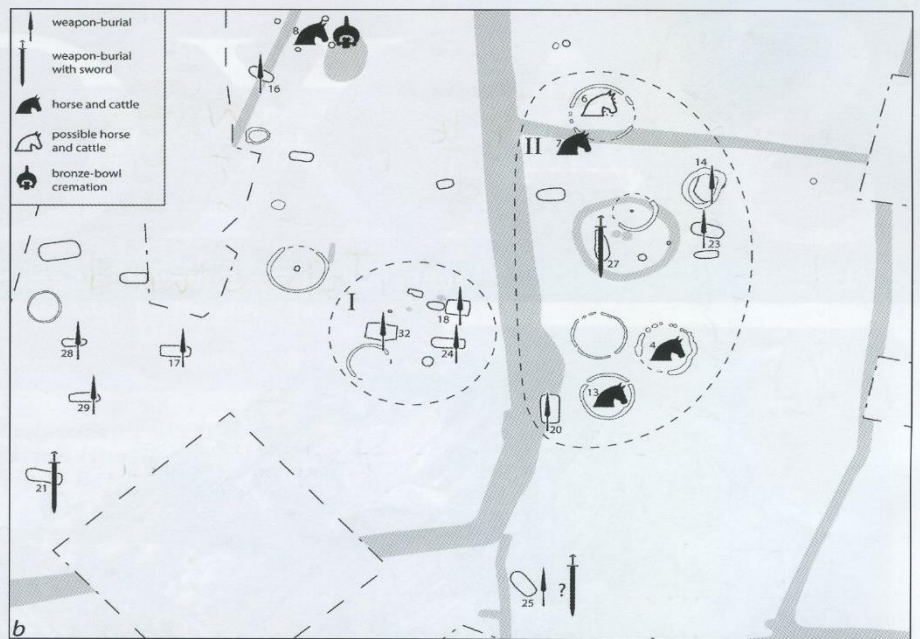
The graves represent just a small sample of what was undoubtedly a much larger cemetery. Finds made in the 1980s just to the north-west of the site probably represent ploughed up grave-goods. They include the Byzantine bronze pail displayed today at the Visitor Centre, a



further luxury of the 6th century. The location of the associated 'folk' settlement is unknown, possibly modern Woodbridge overlies it. The spot for the cemetery was deliberately chosen with the ancient landscape in mind. Possibly it was sited within a large enclosure earthwork, part of an extensive Iron Age field-system that had covered the ground above the river. Also one group of burials was focused on a small Bronze Age barrow. Significantly, this now represents the first definite evidence of the funerary use of the landscape before the Anglo-Saxons. Environmental sampling, together with plant and wood remains preserved on metal objects from graves have allowed some reconstruction of the heathland terrain, as well as informing about an intriguing aspect of the inhumation rite. It seems that once a body and any grave-goods had been placed, a covering of grasses or similar was laid in the graves as a last act, before the soil was returned.

The hanging-bowl cremation pointed to a lady of standing, but the research was to show that there was more that was special about the Tranmer House 'folk'. Despite the relatively small number of graves excavated, thirteen of the inhumations had weaponry: swords, spearheads and fittings from shields. This suggested a predominantly male population and a dominant martial character, at least in the part of the cemetery encountered. Just four graves had female-type grave-goods. Whilst the rite of weapon-burial need not always indicate an actual warrior (Härke 1990), the unusual frequency of the rite, just prior to the founding of Sutton Hoo, c. 590/600, would seem more than coincidence. Similar 'warrior' concentrations have been noted at other important sites, including at the planned West Saxon port-town of *Hamwic* (St Mary's, Hampshire) and in the East Saxon cemetery of the Prittlewell 'prince' (Essex).

Two or possibly three graves had contained swords and in one (inhumation 21) also was a shield decorated with gilt and silver mounts of zoomorphic form: one is an eagle, the other a fantastical creature with a blade-like jaw and four limbs or fins. This pairing was quickly compared with the grander eagle and 'dragon' from the shield in the Mound 1 burial, a Scandinavian import par excellence. In fact, their study by Tania Dickinson (2005) established the possibility that the Tranmer House shield decoration might actually have been directly influenced by the Northern import. This and other evidence suggested the grave dated c. 550–575. Subsequent analysis of the other 'warrior' graves indicated a similar date for the majority.

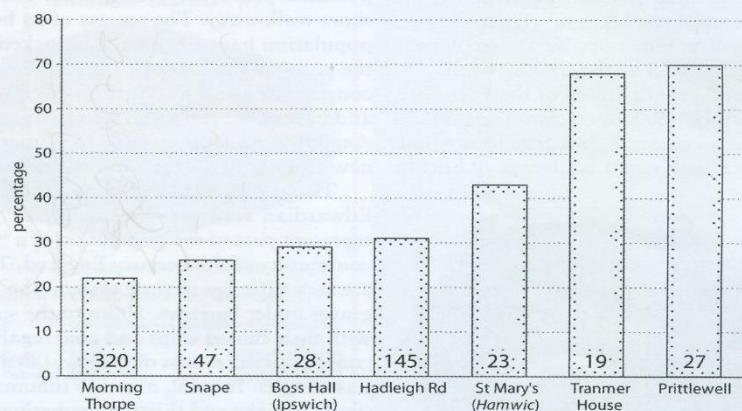


The graves at Tranmer House, showing status attributes of the cremation graves (hanging bowl, ring-ditches and horse-cattle offerings) and inhumation graves (weaponry) (After Fern 2015 © Suffolk County Council Archaeology Service)

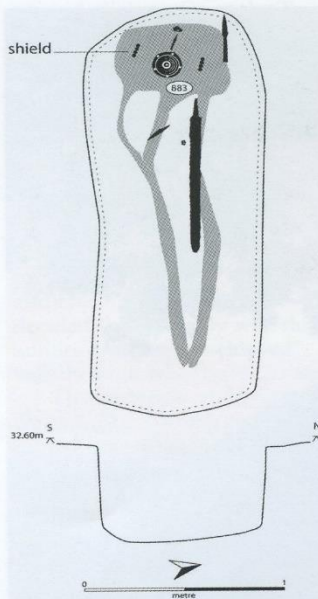
A number of the cremations were surrounded by small ring-ditches (as was one inhumation), and other ring-ditches found without burials were probably originally associated with the rite. Each would have had a small mound originally. These have parallels in England, but small monuments with cremations are far more common on the northern Continent and in Scandinavia. Their incidence further pointed to graves of above-average status. Examination of the fragmented burnt bone by Jackie McKinley and Julie Bond confirmed this, by identifying a wealth of animal remains in multiple instances: horse, cattle, sheep, pig and bird. The horse and cattle offerings, in particular, indicate valuable sacrifices. Most of the

human bone was that of females, invoking an intriguing contrast with the dominance of 'warrior' burials in the inhumation rite.

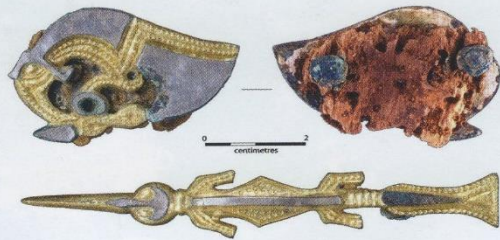
Animal offerings were a characteristic feature of the cremation rite in parts of England in the 5th century, most notably for East Anglia at the site of Spong Hill (Norfolk) (McKinley 1994). They are less common in Suffolk - except, of course, in the cremation graves of Sutton Hoo. In fact, the animal-cremation rite at the 2000 cemetery appears remarkably akin to that seen in the cremations at the neighbouring 'royal' cemetery. The latter graves are different, of course, in their separateness and monumental scale. But the key question was how close these similar rites were in date? Cremation graves are difficult to



The incidence of 'warrior' burial at Tranmer House compared with other sites. The numbers in the columns indicate the total inhumation burials in each case (After Fern 2015)



eagle and 'dragon' mounts



Inhumation 21, with the shield mounts and a reconstruction by Kate Morton (After Fern 2015 © Suffolk County Council Archaeology Service; shield mounts © Trustees of the British Museum)



study chronologically, due to their typically meagre remains. However, the bone can be radiocarbon dated. Funding for this was provided by the Sutton Hoo Society, along with the study of the results using Bayesian Modelling by Peter Marshall. The results were truly important. They revealed that the cremations were most likely of similar date to the cemetery's inhumations, and thus belonged to the half-century (c. 550–590) preceding the establishment of Sutton Hoo. By this time, the rite was rare elsewhere in England. Therefore, the cemetery remains suggest a significant local community with certain marked funerary characteristics: animal cremation, small monuments, a high incidence of 'warrior' burial, and a hanging-bowl grave. Together with the position of the graves at the edge of a larger cemetery, this could suggest a climactic end-

phase to the burial-ground driven by local competition between groups – rich funerals, made striking with animal sacrifices and charged by emotion, could be powerful claims to status by living descendants.

The latest graves at Tranmer House suggest a possible end to the cemetery just as Sutton Hoo was founded, perhaps by the ultimately successful leading local family, c. 590/600. The appearance of the animal-cremation rite at the cemetery, around c. 550, furthermore, now argues for Scandinavian influence in the setting earlier than previously thought (around the date the Mound 1 shield was imported). In Scandinavia the rite was a key feature of elite funerary practice at this time, seen together with the custom of covering graves with small monuments. Influence from the region has long been

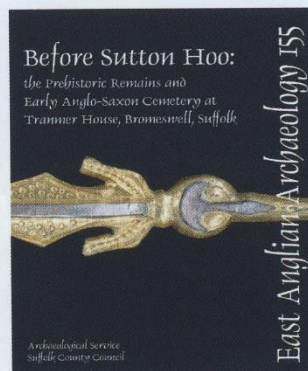
recognised in the mounds of Sutton Hoo; now the Tranmer House graves suggest it might have been established several generations before. Thus, the rare traits, which the two cemeteries share, and their dovetailed chronologies, may substantiate what at first seemed fanciful, the possibility of a real lineal connection. Significantly, this period in the later 6th century is coincident with the historical date of the emergence of the *Wuffingas* – the royal line of East Anglia. Sutton Hoo was possibly founded to memorialise that dynasty, its exclusiveness as a site of burial was in deliberate contrast with the folk-cemetery tradition of the previous century, but its location was perhaps influenced above all by the desire to command a funerary landscape of past rivals and honoured ancestors.



The Celtic bronze hanging bowl that contained cremation 8 (© Trustees of the British Museum). The bronze would originally have been polished and golden, and the mounts were decorated with bright red enamel.



The 6th-century Byzantine bronze pail, punched and incised with a hunting scene and inscription in Greek, on display in the Visitor Centre (Nigel Maslin)



Before Sutton Hoo: the Prehistoric Remains and Early Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Tranmer House, Bromeswell, Suffolk by Christopher Fern is published by East Anglian Archaeology (EAA volume 155), ISBN 978 0 9568747 5 7, 250pp, 121 illustrations, £25

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Chris Fern will be giving the Society's Basil Brown lecture at the Riverside Theatre in Woodbridge on Saturday 28 May at 11.00am.



The atmosphere of the burial ground is strong but fragile (all photos National Trust)

November 2015 saw the announcement of a £150,000 development grant to Sutton Hoo from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Should the development testing be successful, this would be followed by a £2.4 million grant to transform the visitor experience. This grant reaffirms the Lottery's support for Sutton Hoo following their generous funding of the current visitor facilities and exhibition which were completed in 2002. Since then well over a million visitors have passed through the exhibition, walked to the site, drunk a cup of tea and driven away. Here ANGUS WAINWRIGHT, National Trust Archaeologist for East Anglia, outlines their current thinking about improving the experience of visiting the site.

Experiences that move, teach and inspire: releasing the story of Sutton Hoo

It is easy to feel complacent when you see smiling faces and happy visitors, but it is as well to avoid easy assumptions and try to gain a more objective understanding of what visitors really think. Surveys over the years began to reveal some shortcomings in what the National Trust was offering the visitor to Sutton Hoo, a pattern of disappointment began to emerge. Firstly there was the problem of expectations. At the most extreme, people were expecting to see a ship, an active dig or all the genuine finds from the excavations. More commonly there was an undefined feeling of disappointment: this reaction was most often expressed after visiting the mounds, some simply saying the mounds weren't big enough!

The second major challenge emerging over the last twelve years was that many visitors did not get emotionally

involved with Sutton Hoo: they did not leave the site excited by the significance of Sutton Hoo, or fully understand its many stories and ideas that have been revealed and explored by its investigators. Sutton Hoo for some visitors is an enjoyable experience for which they have waited many years and travelled many miles, but sadly for others it can be an underwhelming experience.

On the positive side, the exhibition was delivering the factual information about Sutton Hoo well. Those who like to explore a subject in depth were inspired to buy books from the shop: the ones about Sutton Hoo published by The British Museum Press were mostly being sold through the Sutton Hoo shop, rather than through their own shop in the British Museum. Visitors also loved to meet experts on the site, so guided tours,

exhibition talks and craft demonstrations scored well in surveys.

Over the years changes were made to the exhibition in response to these surveys. The reconstructed burial chamber was made accessible to enable visitors to experience what it might have been like to enter it in the 7th century. Tranmer House was dressed as it might have been during Mrs Pretty's ownership and the story of the 1930s dig and the characters involved was interpreted using costumed interpreters. Although these changes were popular, they tended to make the visit to Sutton Hoo disjointed and confusing in places; they did not transform the experience as was hoped.

In addition to these challenges, there were the simple problems connected to the passage of time. Exhibitions wear out and become old fashioned. New facts

emerge, discoveries at the Tranmer House cemetery have added a whole new aspect to the Anglo-Saxon archaeology of Sutton Hoo, whilst discoveries up the river at Rendlesham are putting the burial ground into the context of the living élite of 7th century East Anglia.

For the Sutton Hoo enthusiast, it is depressing to think that any visitor should leave the site uninspired; our ambition has always been that all visitors should be able to find something to inspire and fascinate them. It was decided that the only way this ambition could be achieved was through wholesale change.

The ambition, then, is to create a place which enthralls its visitors whilst enhancing its status, and to do so without damaging the fragile atmosphere of the place. There are a number of ways this may be done. Firstly the routes around the property must be addressed so that visitors can find their way around and be brought to the burial site without their experience being marred by passing tractors or countless stock fences. A new and more attractive route is being designed which will bring one to the mounds with a more dramatic sense of arrival. Once there, how do you get over the problem of the burial ground with its low mounds and surrounding farm lands? One solution might be to take the visitors up above the tree tops where they can view the mounds in their landscape context, especially the all-important relationship to the river. More critically the whole way the interpretation is done needs overhauling, both to make a visit more logical and

also more seamless, passing from the exhibition, through Tranmer House, and out to the site, engaging every visitor more strongly with the interpretation themes.

Some of what will be done will build on what has already proved successful. Chances to meet experts on the site and aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture will be increased by developing specialised teams of volunteers. Some will deliver hands-on craft activities, enabling visitors to

an archaeologist searching for clues to the past. These are some of the ways in which the project is going to transform the overall visitor experience.

With such a reliance on volunteers, it will be crucial to develop closer ties with the local community and also local organisations with similar interests, such as Woodbridge Museum and of course Woodbridge Riverside Trust, with their exciting ambition to reconstruct the

Sutton Hoo ship at the town's waterfront. We will continue to build on our partnerships with Ipswich Museum and the British Museum, as well as reaching across the water to sites such as Gamla Uppsala in Sweden.

Some of the exhibition themes will be expanded, notably the theme of investigation and discovery which has proved so popular in Tranmer House. The theme of 'The First Page of English History' will also be expanded to show how the culture of the early Anglo-Saxons was the soil in which English national culture later took root. We may

also be able to explore some ideas about the nature and origin of this English identity which are proving so controversial today.

The initial Heritage Lottery development grant will be used to trial various ideas and techniques, enabling The National Trust to prove that the new concepts will indeed transform the visitor's experience of Sutton Hoo. So a lot of these ideas will be tried out over the coming year and while some will no doubt fail, others will succeed and form the foundation of a new era at Sutton Hoo.



Paul Mortimer dressed as King Raedwald demonstrates that different forms of interpretation appeal to different audiences

understand some of the techniques of experimental archaeology. Others will help visitors to try out some hands-on archaeology so they can participate in the archaeological investigation of the landscape. It may even be possible to pair-up some of these activities with academic institutions undertaking aspects of Professor Carver's research plan for the estate (see *Saxon* 61/1-2). Family groups will be encouraged to explore the landscape, either as an Anglo-Saxon searching for resources, or



A guided walk on Mound 1: expert volunteers are key to our plans for Sutton Hoo

The Sutton Hoo Society's summer outing on Wednesday 19 August was a private view *Behind the Scenes* at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford with Dr Eleanor Standley, Assistant Keeper in Medieval Archaeology. MARC BREWSTER enjoyed the handling session and the buffet lunch at Balliol College, but found that it meant a very early start.

A day at the Ashmolean



The Alfred Jewel, 871-899: enamel, gold and rock crystal. Probably a pointer, it bears the words AELFRED MEC HEHT GEWYRCAN, 'Alfred ordered me to be made' Found in 1693 at North Petherton, Somerset, near Athleney Abbey, Alfred's marshland stronghold. (AN1836 p.135.371 © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford)

Our day started early, departing Sutton Hoo at 7:15am, on the coach to Oxford. After the trials of the M25 and tribulations of Oxford traffic, we finally disembarked in Beaumont Street, opposite the Ashmolean, just after 11:30. We divided into four groups, with the first two enjoying a guided tour of the galleries and handling session before lunch; the remainder spent the morning at their leisure, with many opting to stay and examine the wide array of exhibits offered by the museum.

The museum itself has its origins in the early 1600s, when John Tradescant (d. 1638) amassed a collection of antiques and curiosities. On his death they were gifted to Elias Ashmole (1617-92) who stipulated that they should be exhibited in a museum and the Ashmolean opened in 1683. More than 300 years later, the collection has grown and now spans six floors.

Walking around the museum's galleries, you experience the passage of time as you ascend: the ancient world is at ground level, rising up through the medieval period and into the 19th century on the top floor. Some highlights were the Sumerian King List, a baked clay prism naming the kings of the ancient near east; the Chalgrove Hoard containing a rare coin of the emperor Domitianus; the Anglo-Saxon exhibits on the second floor, with the Alfred Jewel taking pride of place and finally, newly cleaned, *The Hunt in the Forest* by Uccello, a fine example of the vanishing point technique.

At 1:30 the groups converged on Balliol College for a buffet lunch. Sitting on the long benches, overlooked by portraits of previous masters, you cannot resist thinking of the famous alumni whose seat you may be sharing: the writer Aldous Huxley, scientist Richard Dawkins, the father and son presenters Peter and Dan Snow, as well as a host of politicians including prime ministers Harold Macmillan and Edward Heath.

After lunch, the groups swapped over, so that everybody had the chance to take the tour and participate in the artefact handling session with Dr Eleanor Standley - in my opinion the highlight of the day. The artefacts ranged from the mundane, such as an antler pottery stamp, to the exquisite, a gold cloisonné garnet brooch, reminiscent of Sutton Hoo. But in each case the items were fascinating, telling one aspect of a story in an owner's life; in almost every case these were treasured or working items that were important to somebody.

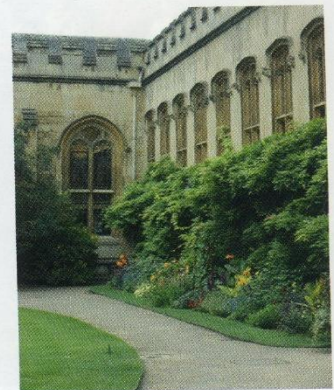
There were seven objects in total. The first was a 6th century girdle hanger, with ring and dot decoration, from the Barrington cemetery in Cambridgeshire; the two repairs indicated a treasured possession, perhaps an heirloom? Next came four brooches, a pair of 6th century gilded copper alloy saucer brooches, from the upper Thames valley; a 6th century female square-headed brooch; and lastly a 7th century gold and copper composite disc brooch, with cloisonné garnets and bone (or ivory) centrepiece.



Lunch in Balliol Hall (Marc Brewster)

The fifth item was a German palm cup or *Tummler* from Andernach, similar to those found at Finglesham and associated with both male and female burials. Finally, we examined some practical working items from Oxfordshire; an antler pottery stamp, from Shakenoak, with an incised cross on its end and a silver ingot mould, that indicates trade between the Saxon kingdom and Danelaw.

Our gratitude goes to Dr Standley and her assistant for guiding us through the handling and identification of these objects. They steered us in the right direction and drew out the answers from our accumulated knowledge, gathered over the years of our fascination with this subject. Finally, a big thank you to Megan Milan for organising a fantastic day out.



A corner of the quad at Balliol College (Marc Brewster)



The burials, marked in recent times by flints, grouped around the site of Mound 5, looking northwest (all photos Nigel Maslin)

How are we to understand the late Anglo-Saxon execution burials that surround Mound 5, and the others just east of the barrow cemetery? That is a quandary facing every Sutton Hoo guide. Professor Andrew Reynolds wrote about them collectively as 'deviant' burials, but Professor Martin Carver characterised them specifically as 'dissident' burials. Here, Dr SAM NEWTON questions whether we really have the evidence to be so decisive and Prof. MARTIN CARVER defends his choice of words.

Sutton Hoo: Burial Ground of Dissidents?

by Dr Sam Newton www.wuffings.co.uk

On the front page of the last issue of **Saxon**, Professor Martin Carver states that, 'under the Christian kings of East Anglia' Sutton Hoo became a 'dedicated place of execution by hanging' from the 8th to the 10th centuries, and that 'its ancestral mounds were relegated to a killing place for dissidents...' (Carver and Hummler 2015, 1).

Martin must be referring here to the two groups of 39 burials which he excavated at Sutton Hoo over 20 years ago, one out in the field to the east of the site (Group 1) and the other spread around the east and south sides of Mound 5 (Group 2). According to his report on Sutton Hoo published in 2005, out of a total of 39 burials excavated from the two groups, some of them might have been hanged and some might have been beheaded, but the evidence either way is often very slight (Carver *et al* 2005, 315-359).

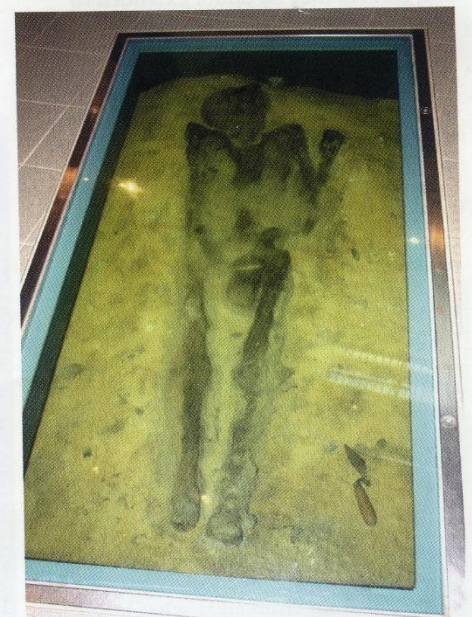
He refers to both groups as 'execution burials', but in the cases where decapitation is suspected, how can we be sure that they were the result of execution? Beheading in the course of battle may also be a possibility, as can be seen on the Bayeux Tapestry. Another possibility has been suggested by Dr Marilyn Dunn, namely post-mortem decapitation to prevent the dead from haunting the living, particularly during times of plague (Dunn 2009).

As to dating, most of the burials in the two groups yielded insufficient quantities of bone collagen to enable radiocarbon testing, while others were unfortunately contaminated by the chemicals used to consolidate the 'sand bodies'. In the end,

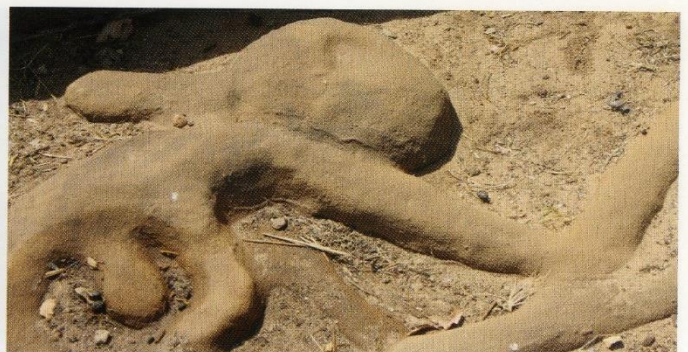
out of the 39 burials which were excavated, there were radiocarbon date results from only eight of them (Carver *et al* 2005, 54-55). Bearing in mind that radiocarbon dating ranges depend on probabilities and need to be handled very carefully, it appears that four of these are datable between the late 9th to the 12th centuries, the period when East Anglia was ruled by Danish, West Saxon, and Norman lords. Only four burials may be dated to the time of 'the Christian kings of East Anglia', that is, before the death of the most famous of them, St Edmund, killed by the Danes on 20th November 869. Surely four out of 39 results provide too small a sample to have any significant statistical weight. As such, it is arguable that the statement that '...under the Christian kings of East Anglia ... [Sutton Hoo] became a dedicated place of execution by hanging (8th to 10th century)' might not be fully warranted by a reasonable assessment of the published results.

But whatever fate brought these unknown people to their graves at Sutton Hoo, on what grounds are we to regard them as 'dissidents'? The word *dissident* appears to have been first used in the 16th century to refer to those who dissent from religious orthodoxy. In more recent times it has come to be used of those who voice political dissent, particularly in totalitarian states. To project this word onto early Anglo-Saxon culture might thus be considered to be of questionable validity for our understanding of the landscape of Sutton Hoo.

I cannot find any mention of the word by Professor Andrew Reynolds in his book



Two views of burial 23 under its flooring in the Visitor Centre



The anomalous 'ploughman' burial from the eastern cemetery group under its wooden cover on the burial site

Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs (Reynolds 2009). Nor does it appear in Martin's 2005 report on his work at Sutton Hoo, though it has been used in the publicity associated with it. For example, at the launch of the report, the University of York stated on its website that 'the execution victims' at Sutton Hoo 'are seen as ideological dissidents of the victorious Christian regime' (www.york.ac.uk). Similarly, the sales publicity on Amazon says that 'from the eighth to tenth century, this 'burial ground of kings' became an execution site, allowing the new Christian authorities to exercise power through the public disposal of dissidents' (www.amazon.co.uk).

Martin has himself repeated the word in a number of other places, usually in remarks similar to those cited above. For example, in a paper published in 2011, he refers to 'the degree of personal control brought in with the Christian era, control that no doubt extended to sexual behaviour as well as loyalty to the new regime and elimination of dissidents' (Carver 2011, 846). More recently, he uses it in the published text of his talk on King Rædwald, originally broadcast on Radio Three. Referring to the two groups of 39 burials, he says that 'the date, the 8th -10th centuries, suggests that this was the work of the new Christian kings, who were now disposing of their dissidents in the old pagan burial ground'(Carver 2013, 9).

It would appear then that Professor Carver is the only one talking about 'dissidents' at Sutton Hoo. Whenever he does so, it seems to be without any corroborative reference or qualification. His repeated use of the word, imbued as it is with his professorial authority, gives the impression that its use is not just his opinion, but is fully and demonstrably justified by the archaeology. As far as I know, however, he has never anywhere made a convincing archaeological case for regarding these 39 burials as those of "dissidents"

It is also far from clear what he means by 'dissidents' at Sutton Hoo. He seems to use the word in its more modern political

sense, as if to imply that the burials are those of people who were political activists subverting the rule of 'the Christian kings of East Anglia' and who were subsequently martyred because of their dissent. Are we to imagine that they somehow represent an Anglo-Saxon Peoples' Front of non-Christian Republicans?

None of this would probably matter very much if he was presenting his case before a jury of his scholarly peers, as he did with some of his earlier theories about Sutton Hoo at the research conferences held in Oxford in the late 1980s. He responded then to criticism with admirable aplomb, and the questions which I raise here are intended in a similar spirit of open scholarly discussion. With all due respect to Professor Carver, what concerns me is that his apparently unsubstantiated view that Sutton Hoo should be seen as a burial-ground of 'dissidents' now seems to be part of the public's perception of Sutton Hoo.

Certainly this view has dominated the National Trust exhibition at Sutton Hoo since its opening in 2002. In particular, the large painting of a hanged man, who looks suspiciously like the actor Brad Pitt wearing prison camp trousers, with some sort of cross-bearing cleric presiding over the execution, has given gruesome form to the view. The picture stands prominently in the hall between the replica burial-chamber and the treasure-room. In the floor directly beneath it, moreover, exhibited under perspex is a body-cast of one of the 39 burials, which, for some reason, is unlabelled. It would be interesting to know which one of the burials this is - it looks like the undated burial 23 from Group 1 - for its position is plainly intended to imply that the picture above it illustrates the fate of the anonymous figure under the perspex, and that it was representative of the two groups of 39 burials as a whole. This must be confusing for visitors, for the dominant position which the body-cast and painting have been given in the exhibition implies that the 39 burials are central to the story of Sutton Hoo and not part of what is

clearly a later and completely separate chapter in the history of its landscape.

I cannot help worrying about what sense of the spirit of the place visitors take away with them after seeing that painting. In particular, what sort of impression does it make on younger visitors? I know of at least one school group whose teacher led them into the exhibition hall just to see and sketch the image of the hanged 'dissident' before being led out again. How sad it is that those children should have been given such a potentially inauthentic and misleading sense of the cultural significance of Sutton Hoo.

For most people, fortunately, Sutton Hoo is still Britain's 'Valley of the Kings', where a magnanimous lady's dreams led to the discovery of a royal burial-ship laden with artistic and technical wonders from a forgotten Golden Age of the English-speaking peoples.

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Prof. Martin Carver replies:

It's good that Sam raises questions about the execution burials at Sutton Hoo – some of his observations, such as the small number of good dates, I would agree with: others I will try to answer. The detail of everything we were able to observe in the 1980s is hopefully included in the research report (Carver 2005a, chapter 9), while the interpretations are summarised in the revised edition of *Sutton Hoo Burial Ground of Kings* (Carver 2005b; reprinted 2014). I too would have wished for more precision for radiocarbon dates, something that would be more feasible today: the science has moved on famously in 20 years (see Hines and Bayliss (eds) 2013).

The burials under discussion are the 39 numbered graves found in two groups, 16 around Mound 5 and 23 beside a long-lived track further east where they surrounded a set of features interpreted as gallows. Eight radiocarbon dates indicated interment between the 8th and 10th century (omitting the one with consolidant, Carver 2005a pp. 54-5) and the spatial consistency of each group suggested they all belonged together in finite stretches of time and purpose. That they were executions was implied by the postures, which included wrists or ankles laid together as though bound (Burials 19, 25, 37, 38, 39, 41, 49, 52), head at an acute angle (23, 24), rope around neck (49), or head detached (18, 35, 40, 48, 52). Hanging seemed the most likely method of execution, with perhaps the use of a gibbet to account for the peculiarity of some examples (27, 38). Given the state of preservation of the bone, we were not

really in a position to say whether the decapitation was post-mortem or not: the case of the grave that was too short (35) suggests post-mortem as the more likely of the two (Carver 2005a, p. 348). All the burials that could be aged and sexed were young men except for the triple burial (42/43) which contained a middle aged man and two women.



Definitive interpretation is always impossible, as the word implies: evolving interpretation is one of the charms and also one of the frustrations of archaeology. However, the interpretation of these two groups of burials as those of execution victims, mainly by hanging, possibly with the use of a gibbet, has not been particularly controversial, especially after the publication of Andrew Reynolds's thesis in 2009. He showed that there were many informal cemeteries with burials in similar postures that could be interpreted as execution victims: these are mainly dated to the late Saxon period.

More pertinent is the question raised by Sam: what were these unfortunates executed for, and why there and why then. I plumped for an ideologically-driven explanation because the principal change within the high status community that seemed to be making use of Sutton Hoo was the documented conversion to Christianity. As we learn from Bede, this required some radical changes in behaviour, especially in matters relating to sex and marriage.

Since murder and theft are always with us, I felt we should be looking for some special change in the moral climate that caused these execution places suddenly to arrive: rebellion against the changes introduced by the Christian regime seemed to fit the bill, and the choice of the former princely burial ground might be seen as appropriate for those who clung to the old ways (Carver 2005b, pp. 142-3).

This is conjecture, as I am the first to admit; but it would not be fair to brand it as wholly conjecture. It fits with the evidence we have and with Andrew Reynolds's thesis, and of course with what we know of the later Middle Ages. Christian kings and their prelates are not known for having a relaxed attitude to those whom we would today call dissidents. Alternative interpretations are certainly possible: my response is, "Bring them on!"

I am sure Sam's views will be taken into account as the new Visitor Centre is being planned, and I hope mine will too. I think Sutton Hoo is still primarily seen by visitors as the brilliant celebration of an East Anglian princely dynasty for whom we can claim royal status and an international profile. The 'sandmen', as the press love to call them, are not the stars of the show, but they form an interesting and significant part of the history of the site, of East Anglia and of England as a whole.

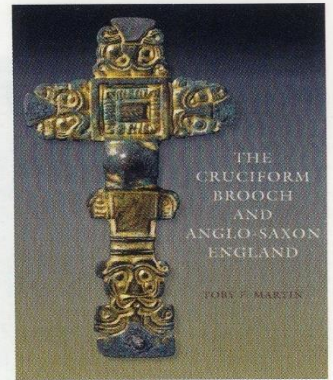
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Looking north to Mound 2 and Tranmer House across some of the execution burials of the flattened Mound 5

Dr Toby Martin is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at Oxford's Institute of Archaeology. Last summer he published *The Cruciform Brooch and Anglo-Saxon England* (Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2015) 978 1 84383 993 4 (£75). After the examination of more than 2,000 examples, his book offers a new typology and a refined chronology of what was once described as 'the Anglian brooch *par excellence*'. NIGEL MASLIN has been reading it.



Side-knobs and head-plates: the Anglo-Saxon search for identity

Cruciform brooches have nothing to do with Christian symbolism: they were simply used by women in the 5th and 6th centuries to fasten their clothing. They developed from simple, functional, safety-pin contraptions to bulky, gilded plates, as hefty as a Scottish plaid brooch. It is that transformation that fascinates Toby Martin.

The origins of the cruciform brooch seem to be in the north German/south Jutland Nydam brooch, which the doyen of Anglo-Saxon archaeology, E.T.A. Leeds, described in 1913 as 'the Anglian brooch *par excellence*'. The tendency to equate a single type of artefact with a particular group of people is long gone, however. This book suggests that it is the changes in the cruciform brooch that are more significant and more defining than its origins, for Dr Martin reads its development in terms of a search for identity, which is currently very fashionable in archaeology.

In England, cruciform brooches are generally found in Kent, East Anglia, the East Midlands, Lincolnshire and the Northeast: Toby Martin offers us a distribution map as his Figure 1. He went on a tour of the museums in eastern England to assess more than 500 brooches, and sampled hundreds of others in the online catalogue of the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS): a total of 2,075 'in varying degrees of fragmentation and completeness' (p. 10). To avoid over-representation, the sample omits some from Norfolk, which are particularly well documented in Heritage Environment Records (HERs). Comprehensive illustration being impractical, an online dataset on the Archaeological Data Service website provides 'A corpus of Anglo-Saxon cruciform brooches'

English cruciform brooches have been studied before: initially by Åberg in the 1920s, whose oversimplified typology was fleshed out by Leeds, as published posthumously by Pocock as late as 1971. Leeds had originally seen the spread of the late, 'florid' forms as evidence of Raedwald's supremacy over Mercia, whereas in fact the cruciform brooch had already gone out of use by then (p.

8). A 'partial and at times impenetrable' account in German by Reichstein in 1975 did little to further the cause, until in 1990 Catherine Mortimer's unpublished doctoral thesis offered metallurgical insights, though it was quickly overtaken by the plethora of finds recorded after 1997 by the PAS.

So the field was clear and the time was ripe for Toby Martin to offer a comprehensive new typology and chronology of the cruciform brooch in England. Any analysis is hampered by the poor condition of many examples, and defined by the design of the main features of the brooch: the two side-knobs, the big head-plate, and the extended foot, though actually twenty-one component terms are illustrated (Figure 4, p.13). Chapter 2 then presents a typology of four Groups of cruciform brooches, with named sub-types largely based on find spots, in addition to those of Kentish type, illustrated with line drawings and maps.



Front, back and both sides of a cast copper alloy cruciform brooch of c.475-550 (Martin 2015 Phase B) from Edix Hill Hole cemetery, Barrington, Cambridgeshire: BM no. 1876, 0212.69 (Photo Trustees of the British Museum)

Martin's next task - and his next chapter - was 'building a chronological framework', both relative and absolute. Inevitably the work becomes increasingly technical, using correspondence analysis, matrices and seriation: the essential tools of comparative analysis we encountered two years ago (*Saxon* 58, 5-6) when reporting the two major recent works on early Anglo-Saxon archaeology: Hines and Bayliss on the chronology of 6th-7th century graves and Hills and Lucy on the chronology of Spong Hill, Norfolk, our largest excavated Anglo-Saxon cremation cemetery.

Martin is able to present his chronology in simple tabular form (Table 12, p.128). His four main groups of brooches are gathered into three phases. Phase A is dated 420-475 and includes all the Group 1 brooches, which are all Nydam style. Phase B is the main phase, from 475-550, comprising all the Group 2 and Group 3 brooches, and the first three sub-groups of Group 4. They are characterised as Salin's Style I, that more solid, geometric ornamentation that contrasts so sharply with the curvilinear, zoomorphic decoration of Style II that we are more used to from later decades at Sutton Hoo.

The late Phase C brooches include the last four sub-groups of Martin's Group 4 and are dated to 525-560/70. These are 'far fewer, larger and more elaborate, indicative of a more exclusive product' (p.127), petering out with a decline in female furnished burial and widespread changes in continental material culture generally. By this time, there were no continental stylistic parallels, suggesting the cruciform brooch had fallen out of use, and it was already extinct in Norway. The changes around 560 onwards include the apparent end to the Migration Period, the beginning of the Vendel Period in Sweden (a direct parallel to Sutton Hoo) and the replacement of Style I decoration by Style II.

There is therefore more in this book than technical typology and chronology. Martin is at pains to relate the brooches to how people lived and worked in society. He examines all the craft aspects of raw materials and casting, all the 'notching, faceting and scoring' (p.148), the punchmarks and figurative images, as well as repair and re-use, to get close to the cruciform brooch as an individual, treasured possession.

Once, migration theory ruled archaeology, and although long abandoned in its original form, it once again has an important part to play in the understanding of a process that seems increasingly complex. Martin agrees the importance of regional variation: he sees community mass migration in the southeast, shading into elite dominance (the alternative theory) in the north and

west, where migration was more likely led by war leaders and their retinues (p. 174). He then uses popular modern theoretical concepts, such as ethnicity and 'agency' (basically, who did what) to examine how the varieties of the cruciform brooch reflect regional and individual identities. He concludes that, 'the élites who used cruciform brooches evidently saw themselves as distinct from, yet related to, the inhabitants of the homelands cited in their origin myths.' (p. 184) He shows how the formation of these ethnic identities relate closely to the process of forming kingdoms in early Anglo-Saxon England.

This book has given the profession a typology and a chronology which is already the new standard for cruciform brooches and contains much about metalworking and the social patterns of the Migration period that will be of wider use. For amateurs like ourselves, it is a brilliant example of how archaeological analysis is conducted today, technically and interpretively. Reading Chris Fern's report on our front pages, it is easy to see how studies like Toby Martin's can in principle help the identification and interpretation of East Anglian cemeteries in the early/mid 6th century - so long as you have cruciform brooches to work with. Alongside Hines and Bayliss, and Hills and Lucy, Toby Martin's book demonstrates why Anglo-Saxon archaeology is in such an exciting phase at present.

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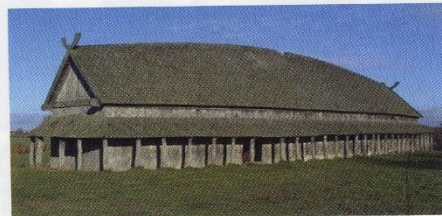
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Off to Denmark, 1-7 June 2016

Our treasurer JONATHAN ABSON writes:

I'm happy to say that the Denmark 2016 tour, with 37 firm bookings, already has enough people to ensure it will go ahead, and is approaching the maximum I envisage. I think it is important that the group is not so large that it becomes unwieldy.

We will visit Gammel Lejre near Roskilde, the supposed location of Heorot, Jelling, where our King Canute (or Knut to the Danes), his father Sweyn Forkbeard, grandfather Harald Bluetooth and his father, Gorm the Old, held sway in a landscape of mounds (considerably bigger than Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo) and a huge stone boat. We have also managed to work in a day at leisure in Copenhagen. On the last full day of the trip we shall be in Schleswig to see the modern reconstruction of the Nydam ship, which is about 200 years older than ours.



Trelleborg (Wikimedia Commons)

Fortunately it is not far from the Danish Offa's dyke and Fyrkat fort, then we will fly back from Hamburg as it is much nearer than Copenhagen.

The cost will be £1300, but we only need a deposit at present. For further details, please write to Jonathan Abson at jonathanabson@virginmedia.com or 66 Bucklesham Road, Ipswich, IP3 8TP

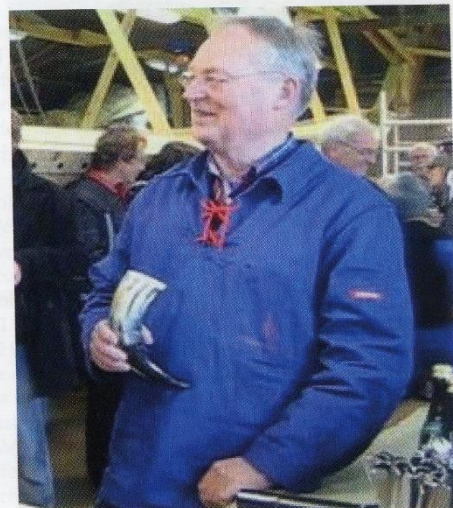


The reconstruction of the Nydam ship during trials in 2014 (Nydam Society)

Death of Nydam Society chairman

Just after our last issue had gone to press, the Society was saddened to hear of the death of Vincent Jessen, chairman of the Nydam Society. Our friend Marc Oliver Ohm in Süderbrarup, Germany, wrote to say that Ole Brixen Ole Søndergaard of the Nydam Society in Denmark, had reported that on Monday 8 June they had all been out rowing *Nydam Tveir*, or *Nydam Two*, their reconstruction of the 4th century ship. Back in port that evening, Vincent collapsed but died shortly afterwards in hospital.

Under his chairmanship, and with the patronage of HRH Prince Joachim of Denmark, the Nydam Society's Boat Guild built *Nydam Two* and launched it in August 2013, since when it has undergone successful trials (*Saxon* 55/5, 56/7, 57/11, 58/1 and 60/8). In co-operation with the National Museum of Denmark and Roskilde Ship Museum, the society continues to support research into the archaeology of Nydam Mose, the bog where the ship was originally found.



The late Vincent Jessen, drinking horn in hand, in front of the reconstruction of the Nydam ship (Nydam Society)

Events Diary

Saturday 13 February, 14.30-16.00
SIAH Lecture by Andrew Tester:
Staunch Meadow, Brandon: A High Status Middle-Saxon Settlement on the Fen Edge
 Blackbourne Hall, Elmswell, IP30 9UH

Friday March 18, 19.30
SHS Spring lecture,
preceded by short AGM
 Dr Sam Lucy (Cambridge): The Trumpington bed burial
 King's River Café, NTSH

Sunday 20 March, 11.15 for 11.30
National Trust Sutton Hoo
 SHS Guides pre-season meeting, including a talk by Dr Angela Evans on Anglo-Saxon Horse Burial, followed by lunch at 13.30 at The Coach & Horses, Melton

17.30 Friday 8 – 13.00 Sunday 10 April
BALH Conference: Growing Local History
 Speakers include Chris Scull on Rendlesham (Friday, 18.00) and Tony Bone (ADLHS) on Barber's Point (Saturday, 11.30)
 University Campus Suffolk, Waterfront Building, Ipswich IP4 1QJ
 See www.balh.org.uk for details

Saturday 23 April, 10.30
SIAH AGM and 3rd Wheeler
Conference: Place-Names Project
 Columbine Hall, Stowupland

SUTTON HOO SOCIETY

NOTIFICATION OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Sutton Hoo Society will be held on **Friday 18 March at 7.30pm** in the King's River Restaurant at Sutton Hoo.

AGENDA

- 1 Apologies
- 2 Minutes of last AGM
- 3 Reports and Accounts
- 4 Election of Auditors
- 5 Election of Committee

Following this short business meeting, Dr Sam Lucy, Cambridge Archaeological Unit and Newnham College, will talk about The Trumpington bed burial.

Michael Argent
 Chairman

Saturday 28 May, 11.00-12.30
SHS Annual Basil Brown Lecture
Chris Fern: The Sutton Hoo 2000 Cemetery
 Riverside Theatre, Woodbridge
 (Booking details TBA)

Wednesday 1 - Tuesday 7 June
SHS Trip to Denmark
 Details from: jonathanabson@virginmedia.com

August/September, TBA
Sutton Hoo Society members' day trip to Battle Abbey, Sussex



WuffingEducation.co.uk

Wuffing Education Study Days
 The Court, NT Sutton Hoo, £38

Anglo-Saxon topics include:

- 27 Feb *Anglo-Saxon Settlements*
 Dr Richard Hoggett (SCCAS)
- 12 Mar *Bishoprics and Battlefields: East Anglia during the 7th Century*
 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

Anglo-Saxon Rendlesham

A Royal Centre of the East Anglian Kingdom
 One-day conference to present the results of archaeological investigation 2008-2014



At the Apex, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

Saturday 24th September 2016, 10am-5pm

Find out more at: heritage.suffolk.gov.uk/rendlesham-conference-2016



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www.suttonhoo.org

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Printing
 Henry Ling Ltd, The Dorset Press
 23 High East Street, Dorchester
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Registered Charity no. 293097