

Sutton Hoo

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Beowulf's Funeral
from Seamus Heaney's

Beowulf A New Translation

"The Geat people built a pyre for Beowulf, stacked and decked it until it stood four square, hung with helmets, heavy war-shields and shining armour

Then his warriors laid him in the middle of it, mourning a lord far-famed and beloved. On a height they kindled the highest of all funeral fires. Fumes of wood smoke billowed darkly up, the blaze roared and drowned out their weeping, wind died down and flames wrought havoc in the hot bone house, burning it to the core. They were disconsolate and wailed aloud for their lord's decease. A Geat woman too sang out in grief; with hair bound up, she unburdened herself of her worst fears, a wild litany of nightmare and lament. Her nation invaded enemies on the rampage, bodies in piles, slavery and abuse. Heaven swallowed the smoke. Then the Geat people began to construct a mound on a headland, high and imposing, a marker that sailors could see from afar, and in ten days they had done the work. It was their hero's memorial; what remained from the fire they housed inside it, behind a wall as worthy of him as their workmanship could make it. And they buried torques in the barrow and jewels and a trove of such things as trespassing men had once dared to drag from the hoard.

Then twelve warriors rode around the tomb, chieftain's sons, champions in battle, all of them distraught, chanting in dirges, mourning his loss as a man and a king

[Sutton Hoo: A National Trust Guide](#)

[The Making of the Landscape](#)

“The Sandlings form a sandy tract along the coast of East Anglia ... at some times in the past it was almost continuous heath land

About ten and a half thousand years ago, after the last retreat of the ice, the old seabed was exposed as a land surface through which the River Deben formed a channel. Humans of modern type came north from Europe. Here they hunted and gathered until around 3,500 BC when groups used pottery and primitive hand mills. Such people visited Sutton Hoo.

Around 2,000 BC a settlement of circular wooden framed houses arose near large ditched enclosures on the cemetery field. In later centuries folds were built here for sheep or cattle, and arable farming was restricted to the slopes and the river sides.

By about 700 BC there were many places near the Alde, Deben and Orwell estuaries where bronze founders gathered hoards of implements and recast them.

Suffolk became intensively farmed to supply grain to Roman garrisons on the Rhine (modern day Germany).

...after Roman withdrawal from Britain turf and scrub over the infertile sand.”

Pages 30-31

[A Land Mark of Power](#)

The Hoo at Sutton is the ‘haugh’ of old English, meaning a high place and especially the bluff or promontory of a hill.

The estuary of the River Deben formed a special, perhaps once a sacred, navigable link between the tidal landfalls around Sutton and the open waters of the North Sea – the maritime high way to the continent. At Rendlesham, another Hoo site on this ridge a mile or two upstream from Sutton Raedwald’s nephew had his royal dwelling in around 660, when the King of Essex was baptised there. Was that also the site of Raedwald’s Hall?

A second boat grave has been found at the site “This now reconstructed mound is conspicuous from the opposite bank, this was a special base for the House of the Wuffings, Raedwald’s family and that Sutton Hoo served as their royal cemetery.

In the upheavals which first brought the Anglo Saxons to Britain during the 5th and 6th Centuries, new centres of power began to form around the Baltic and North Sea coast lands, usually focused upon navigable havens and marked by large mounds and cemeteries. The noble cemeteries of central Sweden for example at old Uppsala, Vendel and Valsgarde, also reflect ship burial customs and contain helmets and shields very like those from Sutton Hoo ship. These Suffolk rulers belonged to

an international culture in which the sea was not a barrier but a path of communication.

Page 18

[The Origins of Beowulf and the Pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia: Sam Newton](#)

“The recent re-excavation of Mound Two, for example, has revealed how much higher it would originally have been.

It is possible therefore that Sutton Hoo would have been seen from the site of Ramsholt Church just over four miles away. It may also have been just visible from the Roman Saxon shore fortress at Walton, formally situated some eight miles to the south on a cliff commanding the river’s mouth (now lost through coastal erosion).

p.44

“Sutton Hoo is also of interest here for another reason, for at least two of the barrows, Mounds One and Two, covered rich ship-burials. The former in particular offering unique English corroboration for the poetic account of the royal rite of ship burial in Beowulf On the present evidence, attested Anglo-Saxon examples of the rite on the scale of this account are to be found only in East Anglia, especially in South East Suffolk at Sutton Hoo on the River Deben and at Snape on the River Alde.

..... there may be a case for regarding East Anglia as a possible source for the Beowulf Account. Indeed the way in which the rite is represented in that account seems to come so close to the ceremony implied by the contents of Mound One at Sutton Hoo that some scholars have suspected that it may have been ultimately based on the early seventh century East Anglian practice ...”

p.45

“Yet a ship funeral ceremony on the scale of that entailed by the contents of Mound One at Sutton Hoo is likely to have been a memorable event”.

p.51

“The late Mr George Arnott, a much respected authority on the history of the River Deben had heard during his childhood – many years before its discovery – that there was a ship buried at Sutton Hoo. Writing in the 1940’s, he recalled that:

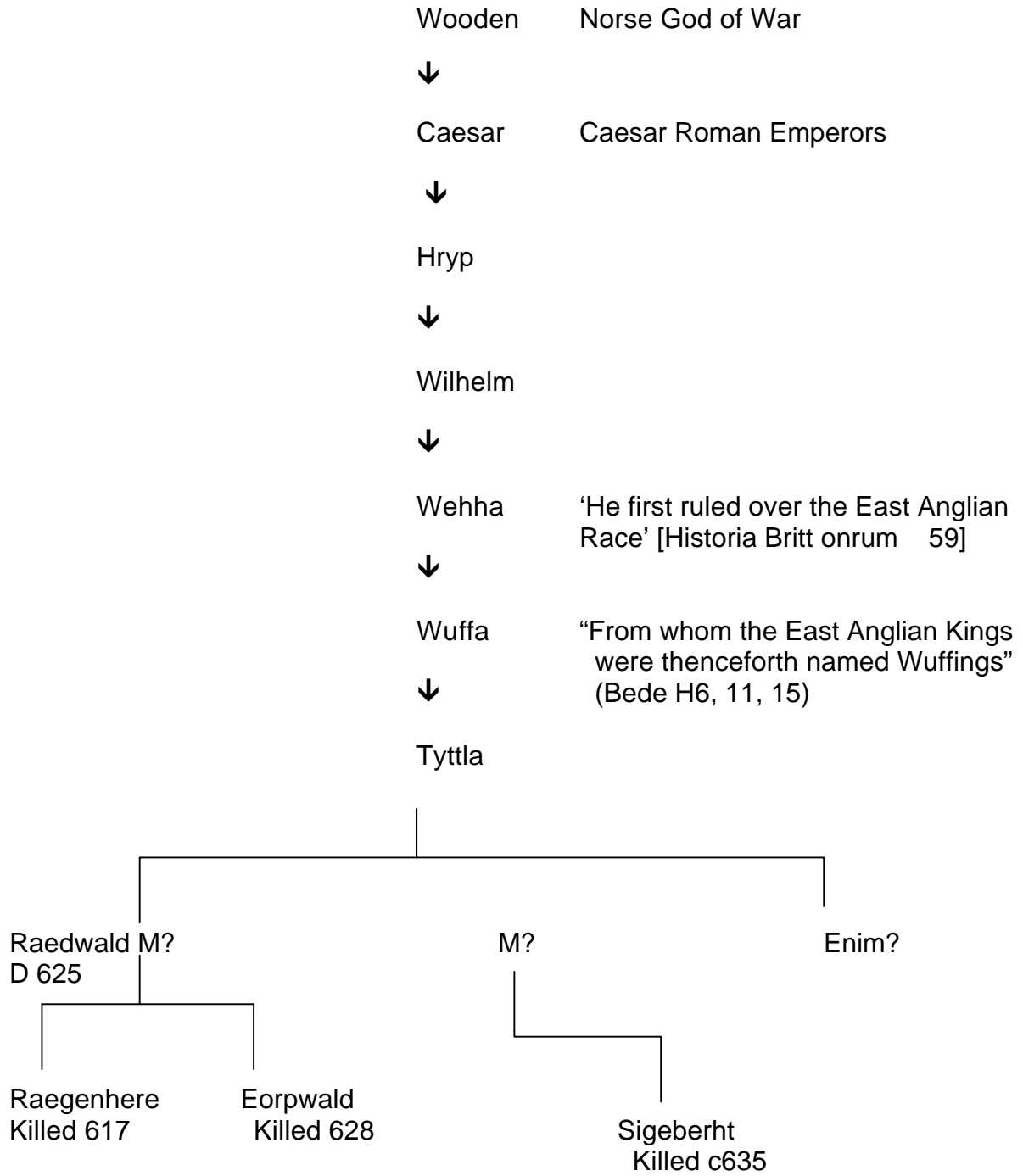
“My father told us about the ship, a tradition he had learnt from the countryside and it became so much part of my childhood surroundings that I never really thought much about it. I took it all for granted. We used often to row across to Sutton cliff and walk over to the turnstile and my father would describe the long-ship which lay buried there

We had no doubt about the burial mounds in our own minds and never questioned it. When on that great day in the summer of 1939, the largest mound was opened, I felt

no surprise that there had been a ship there, and I think that it would have come as quite a shock if nothing had been found”.

p.51-52

The genealogy of the Kings of East Anglia (Family Tree)



(adapted from Sam Newton)

A. 111 125 –7 132-3 171

Penguin Classics: Bede: [Ecclesiastical History of the English People](#).

[Whose Who in Bede's History](#)

King Ethelbert of the Kentish people married Bertha a Frankish Princess who was Christian. Converted to Christianity by Augustine a Missionary from Rome sent by the Pope Gregory. Legend records that Gregory was inspired to send this Mission by a visit to the Roman Slave Market and on seeing fairheaded and handsome slaves asked an attendant where they were from was told that they were Angles "Angle". "No not Angles but Angels" was Gregory's response. The truth was there were long established links between the Roman Catholic Church based in Rome and the Christian Celtic Church of the British Isles.

Slaves were an important export product from British Isles.

Raedwald King of the East Angles died c 625

High King over all the Anglo Saxon Kings [Bretwalda]. He became a Christian but later reverted to Paganism, thus damning him in Bede's view.

Eorpwald, Raedwald's son and successor

King Eorpwald was persuaded to abandon his worship of idols and accept the faith of Christ Not long after he became a Christian he was killed by a pagan. This was in a battle against the pagan King of Mercia, Penda.

Sigbert died 635 AD

Another son of Raedwald

"King Sigbert was a Christian He gave up his Kingdom and went into a monastery. Later King Penda of Mercia attacked the East Angles, so the East Angles dragged Sigbert out of the monastery and took him into battle with them. When Penda's army charged Sigbert ... killed.

It is likely that Sigbert would have a Christian burial possibly at Ely.

(Pagans 2 Christians 0. I know who I'd support in 620's!)

Raedwald's Pagan Wife

Bede saw her as a bad influence. Though he acknowledges she had a better sense of "Honour" than Raedwald.

Edwin King of Northumbria

As a young man an exile at Ethelbert's and Raedwald's court. Converted to Christianity after gaining his 'crown'. It was due to his influence that the Christian

Church settled and later thrived in Northumberland. Therefore a “good thing” as far as Bede was concerned (apologies to Settlers and York men).

He was the King that drove Prince of Royal House, Edwin, away into exile. Edwin wandered through many kingdoms and ended in Raedwald’s court. Aethelfrith tried to bribe Raedwald into murdering Edwin – Raedwald refuses on the advice of his ‘Pagan’ wife. Honour is above price!

[Bede Chap. 5 from Book 2 Page 111](#)

Raedwald's position as Bretwaldan

"In the year of our Lord 616 – King Ethelbert of the Kentish folk died after a glorious reign of fifty six years and entered the eternal joys of the Kingdom of Heaven. He was the third English King to hold sway over all the provinces south of the River Humber, but he was the first to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

The first King was:

Aelle King of the South Saxons
Caelin, King of the West Saxons
Ethelbert King of the West Saxons
Raedwald King of East Anglia

who in the life time of Ethelbert acted as the military leader of his own people.

Edwin, King of the Northumbrians, that is the people living North of the Humber, who was a powerful King and ruled all the peoples of Britain, both Angles and Britains

Oswald King of the Northumbrians, but a most Christian one.

Oswy (Oswald's brother) who for a while ruled the same territory and to a large extent conquered and made tributary the Picts and Irish in the Northern parts of Britain.

Bede chap. 12 Pages 126-128

Raedwald resisting the temptations of Aethelfrith of Northumbria to murder Lord Edwin a guest in Raedwald's Hall. [In Epic poetry and in British tribal societies the most treacherous act is to turn on guests whom you have welcomed to your Hall].

"Now the vision was this. When ...Aethelfrith was persecuting him, Edwin wandered as an unknown fugitive for many years through many lands and kingdoms until at length he came to Raedwald and asked for protection against the plots of his powerful enemy. Raedwald gave him a ready welcome and promised to do everything he asked. But as soon as Aethelfrith heard that he had arrived in that province and that he and his companions were living at the Kings Court as his friends, he sent messengers to offer Raedwald a large sum of money to murder him.

Edwin hears of the plot from one of his own friends, but tells him Raedwald has offered him hospitality and he must trust him, as it is against the warrior code to attack your host. After some time (in which has been visit by an 'Angel') Edwin's friend returns with better news.

"... the King has had a change of heart. He now intends you no harm and means to keep the promise that he intends you no harm and means to keep the promise that

he made you. For when he privately told the Queen of his intentions to deal with you as I warned, she dissuaded him saying that ...”

“it was unworthy in a great king to sell his best friend in the hour of need for gold and worse still to sacrifice his royal honour, the most valuable of all possessions, for love of money. In brief the king did as she advised, and not only refused to surrender the exiled prince to the envoys of his enemy but assisted him to recover his kingdom”.

Bede Book II Chapter 15 p132 – 133.

(Raedwald's baptism)

“So great was Edwin! Zeal for the true faith that he persuaded King Earpwald, son of Raedwald King of the East Angles to abandon his superstitious idolatry and accept the faith and sacraments of Christ with his whole province. His father Raedwald had in fact long before this received Christian Baptism in Kent, but to no good purpose, for on his return home his wife and certain perverse advisers persuaded him to apostatise (give up) from the true faith ... he tried to serve both Christ and the ancient Gods, and he had in the same shrine an altar for the Holy Sacrifice of Christ side by side with a small altar on which victims* were offered to devils. Aldwulf King of that province, who lived into our own times, testifies that this shrine was still standing in his day and that he had seen it when a boy.

The King Raedwald was a man of noble descent but ignoble in his actions, he was son of Tylila and grandson of Wuffa, after whom all King of the East Angles* are called Wuffings”.

Bede as an Historian

“Victims” are we meant to infer these were human?

Unfortunately I don't read old English and therefore the image this account creates for me is two altars in same room on which 'victims' human or animals are sacrificed to the Old Gods.

This may be misleading one of the greatest authority's on Anglo Saxon England was Sir Frank Stenton. He read Bede's account in the original and his interpretation of this passage is more muted, the altars were together in a sacred place. Offerings were given, possible animal, but could just as easily be coins or other treasured possessions.

*The concept of King of all the English seems to have emerged with Offa King of the Mercians in the last quarter of the 8th Century. This was taken up with alacrity by Wessex Kings in 9th Century. In the Dark Ages generally for the Romans, King and Emperors were not rulers of territories or kingdoms but of peoples or groups of peoples not “Emperor or Rome” but “Roman Emperor”. Raedwald was King of the East Angles not East Anglia.

This is an area of acute historical debate between historians* archaeologists about what the differences might have been between a king, a leader in battle, a prince or an usurper. Many Anglo Saxon princes failed to establish themselves as Kings. This was the issue that precipitated the events of 1066. Even at that late date the closest candidate in blood to Edward the Confessors, Eadgar Aelhling who was in exile (compare with Edwin of Northumbria) was considered too young and too foreign to be seriously considered. It was the strongest war leader there in England, Harold Godwinson, who seized the Crown after Edward died, and in some minds represents the perfect Anglo Saxon hero in life and in death.

The use of sources Bede

No account of 7th Century England can be made without reference to Bede's work. He was born in Northumbria in about 673, and taken as a child into a monastery. For the rest of his life, he learnt and taught, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Astronomy and Medicine as well as more obviously religious subject. As a result of this great learning he was able to make two major contributions to European intellectual history; he was the first to adopt and apply systematically the BC/AD division of time and thereby giving historians a system of dating which could be universal and not dependent on the life of a King or Emperor. Bede's second and more immediately relevant achievement was to record the history of conversion to Christianity of the English people – (Written in 731 p.154 “The Ecclesiastical History of the English people” – HE for short). This is the first piece of historical writing known to have been composed by an English writer. Indeed in producing it he seems to have created the very concept of being “English” rather than, say Saxon, Anglian, Mercian, Britons or Northumbrian. This is perhaps his most enduring monument. His reasons for writing the History have been well put by Edward James [Britain in the First Millenium pub. 2001 Arnold]. “Christianity proceeds from Rome. The Britons (During Roman occupation 60 AD – 450) but they fell into disorder and sin; the English have

received it from Rome, and they too, by Bede's own day, were falling into disorder and sin. Bede wrote his History in large part to call the sinful English Church and people back to God".

God punished the Britons by sending the Angles and Saxons. He would surely punish the Anglo and Saxons too (and so in the eyes of later church men God did; he sent the Vikings!)

If this sounds all too religious and biblical, it is, this was a world of inexplicable events. Ship destroying storms, plagues and pestilence, death and glory in battle victory, Vikings. Inexplicable events like these were attributed to God or the pagan gods who consequently had to be propitiated (to get them on your side) and one where religious authority was unquestioned. In fact questioning authority or tradition of any sort was dangerous as violent confrontations were normal, at least for men (this has not died out 21st Century e.g. emotions and violence caused by football. I often think Cardiff City's hooligan element would be quite at home in the Dark Ages!).

But both men and women were very conscious of the dictates of heroic honour and the duties of personal allegiance (story of Raedwald's wife).

Individual heroes abound though individual villains one seldom identified. Bede himself seems to have loved a good story especially one with a strong moral point, it is tempting to wonder if historical accuracy may not sometimes have been sacrificed to improve the dramatic quality of the narrative. Edward James again "It is important to note that Bede had several agendas, and is certainly not telling us everything he knows, and may be putting things he does tell us into a particular light." Certainly, when it comes to informing us about East Anglia, Bede omits (leaves out) information and does not trouble to hide the omission from us. Raedwald had Christian advisers at his court, but they gave him wrong advice, so we are told nothing about them. Sigebert like the pagan Penda was "a most aggressive man" but this description is left unexplained.

It is important to remember also that written records were scarce and valuable, and so many of the sources Bede used were derived from oral tradition (e.g. Raedwald's altars) and personal communication. As a result though Bede is never untruthful, he may sometimes be mistaken; this means that although the H.E. "is the most informative and graceful historical narrative in England until the 12th Century (Campbell, the Anglo-Saxons p.70) the picture Bede paints excludes much useful detail and may include an unquantifiable number of errors. This is especially true for East Anglia for he does not seem to have considered the Church here as providing many models of Christian orthodoxy.

“Other treasures have survived from seventh century England, but only those from Sutton Hoo are outstanding not only in number but in quantity”.

P32 “Pre Anglo-Saxons”

Ed James Campbell

Finds

- Iron standard 1.60m high
- Stone bar or sceptre mounted with a bronze stag
- Spears and augers
- Remains of a helmet, iron silver, bronze and gold
- Chain mail
- Iron axe
- Long knife (scramasax)
- Sword with jewelled gold pommel and hilt
- Remains of a small six stringed lyre (kept in a beaver skin bag)
- Remains of a shield – wood, leather and iron decorated with dragon and eagle motifs made from gilt, bronze and jewels. (The eagle was a symbol of Woden who could turn into a bird).
- 7 drinking horns
- large gold buckle 13.2 cm in length, weight 414.6 grams. The design is a complex of intertwined animals, snakes and bird heads (13 have been counted).
- A purse lid made from gold and inlaid jewel work
- 17 gold and jewelled mounts for horses' harness
- Silver bowl with roman head engraved on it
- Great silver dish from Byzantium known as Anastasius dish 72.4 cm in diameter bears control stamps dating its manufacture to 491 and 518.
- 2 gold shoulder clasps decorated with jewels – the quality of these are “unsurpassed”. “They are cloisome: that is to say they consist of plates of gold on to which were brazed gold strips set on edge in such a way as to create a pattern of cells into which were fitted thin slices of garnet or millifiori glass”.

Bruce Milford

Quoted from Anglo Saxons Ed. Campbell

The National Trust guide book comments on the Gold and Garnet jewellery from the Sutton Hoo site.

“It was almost certainly made in East Anglia during the early 7th century, possibly on the instruction of the man who was to wear it. The Goldsmith and jeweller who made his sword and belt fittings his purse lid, his massive buckle and his shoulder clasps produced some of the finest work known from Northern Europe that age. They declared a personal importance which their owner had to sustain with confidence.

The Goldsmith had to cleave (cut) many of the neat stones brought into Europe from India, and to shape them, together with cut sections from multi coloured glass rods. These he set into miniature cells of gold each backed with gold foil. In other details his lapidary work became freer, representing interlaced creatures and protective

animal, bird and man-like figures from a visual language widely understood in Pagan and (Christian) Northern Europe”.

(It is worth comparing the design of the jewellery and other gold and jewelled artifacts with the carpet pages from early gospel e.g. The Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels. The “Celtic” influence has resulted in conjecture that the Goldsmith may have been a Briton.

- 3 bronze cauldrons
- 3 buckets for ale
- iron lamp
- wooden bottle
- goose feather pillow
- a purse in which were found 37 gold coins of Merovingian origin (from the area which is now France) The latest of these date to the 620's. Also found were 3 gold hanks and two small gold ingots. It has been suggested that the 40 coins were to pay the forty oarsman to row the boat to the land of the dead. No two coins are from the same mint. Historians have suggested that they came from a larger hoard, King's treasure or profits from a thriving trade with Gaul in slaves perhaps?!
- A set of 10 silver bowls of recent Mediterranean origin with a cross design on each of them
- A bronze bowl from Christian Egypt
- The three hanging bowls, probably of Celtic origin
- A pair of silver spoons 25.4 cm. One is inscribed in Greek letters PAULOS and the other is SAULOS. Were these Christening gifts to Raedwald? [In the new testament, there is the story of Saul a Pagan who was busily bringing Christians to justice who on the road to Damascus received a blinding vision from Christ and as a result converted to Christianity and took the Christian name Paul, subsequently made a Saint, Saint Paul was instrumental in building up the early Christian Church in the Roman Empire. See Acts of the Apostles Ch. 9).
- Chain work complex for the suspension of a bronze bucket. It is an elaborate and stunning piece of iron work which is very difficult to replicate because of the skill in its making. More likely to have been used in the Great Hall rather than a utility piece to support the cooking pots!

These finds suggest “distant influences and wide connections”. Not an inward looking parochial society but one where there was a fluid interchange of materials, goods and cultures. There are similar ship burials excavated in Norway and Sweden. [“In 1904 a ship was found buried under a small mound at Oseberg in Norway. It had a grave chamber which contained the bodies of two women. Robbers had stolen all the jewels and treasure but inside the burial chamber many objects still remained; beds, tapestry work, wooden chests, weaving looms, buckets, lamps, a four wheeled cart, four sledges, two tent frames, fifteen horses, four dogs and one young bull. One body may have been of Aso, a Viking Queen. What is History 2 Detective Work: The Mystery of the Empty Grave, SCHP 1976].

However the strongest supporting evidence for similar type burials comes from Sweden. Professor Bruce Milfino who spent 40 years in studying and analysing the finds in Mound One, points out that the shield and sword were probably made in

Sweden or by armourers from Sweden working in Suffolk exclusively in their traditional Swedish manner and with Swedish moulds and other equipment.

If you take the treasure as a whole one could suggest that the East Angles had strong links with the Germanic world. The animal shapes of the jewellery was of a type that was fashionable all over the world, e.g. mushroom shaped cloisonné can be found on affects from archaeological sites from Sweden to Italy in the 6th Century.

In many ways the treasures show the continuing influence of the Roman Empire. Silver plate is Roman. The helmet is a German version of a late Roman parade helmet. The military subjects in decorative motifs e.g. cavalry, fighting foot soldiers are present in Roman articles. A barbarian king looks to be like a Roman to gain status respectability and authority. The ceremonial whetstone capped by the naturalistic deer could pass as Roman. Bede wrote that the Kings of the East Angles claimed their genealogy back to Wuffa but by the late 8th Century they were claiming descent from Woden, Caesar and Wuffar. Romulus and Remus (the legendary abandoned twins [who were nursed by a she-wolf] and went on to found Rome) appear on East Anglian coins. "In becoming a Christian a barbarian prince moved from a world in which he could eat his dinner from a Roman dish to one in which he could enjoy the idea that he was in some sense a Roman".

Anglo Saxons

Ed. J Campbell

Further details may be found in A. Care Evans

“Seventh Century Kings and the Nature of their Power” from Anglo Saxons J Campbell

“It is to kings that we must turn ... Fundamentally important is the ‘Ecclesiastical History’ of Bede, completed in 731. Copious, intelligent drawing on documents where possible the fruit of wide inquiries, it tells most of what will ever be known of the events of the age.

These sources show England full of Kings (in this respect resembling Ireland and Scandinavia) ... Some kingdoms could be divided among co-heirs (as Essex occasionally was), or more widely among several members of the royal clan... At the bottom of the pyramid of power were petty kings, some of the subordinated heirs of once-independent dynasties, some members of conquering dynasties ... Kingliness was relative.

The power of the greatest kings extended over most of the Anglo-Saxon lands and sometimes beyond (see Bede’s list).

“The chronicle written 392 calls these Kings BRETWALDAS (ruler of Britain or wide ruler”.

It is significant that after the death of Raedwald no southern or eastern kingdom was supreme. Dominance went to the frontier states of Northumbria, Mercia and Wessex. It is probably had much to do with conquests they made at British expense (i.e. Welsh Picts and Scots) ...

Rulers making such conquests had lands to give, slaves to sell and (possibly) minerals to exploit (gold/iron). The dynamics of power in Early England are likely to have been such as to ensure that these advantages enabled them to gather armed power sufficient to dominate their neighbours to the South and East.

In understanding these dynamics the poem Beowulf is useful.

In the political world of the poem four things stand out: the importance of the king’s noble retinue, some of whose members may derive from kingdoms other than his own: an indissoluble connection between success and gifts of gold, the store set by good weapons, which are regarded as treasure; and the endless insecurity associated with feud. A king lives surrounded by noble warriors who feast with him, sleep in his hall by night fight for him and are ready (one hopes) to die for him A king’s followers can come from abroad.....

To secure followers and power treasure is essential... A good king gives ... A bad king ‘begins to hoard his treasures, never parts with gold rings’. Treasure rewards services, creates expectations of loyalty....

The social and emotional significance of gold giving and gold wearing was complex and deep; and it was not for nothing that Beowulf died to win a treasure hoard. With the poet’s interest in treasure goes a similar interest in weapons. Gifts of armour and pattern – welded swords are treated as treasures. (An exhibit at the Sutton Hoo site shows the work and skill that goes into making one of these swords).

“The great treasures found at Sutton Hoo ... shows how strongly at least in some respects seventh century reality resembled what the poet describes. To see the splendid jewellery is to apprehend (know) how men might live and die for such treasures. There is no problem in understanding how arms like those found here might be regarded as treasures, and some of them correspond very closely to descriptions of the poem...

The poem ... mentions mail shirts, as if they were the normal gear for the great. The only certain find of such armour from early England is that from Sutton Hoo Although spears and knives are common in Anglo Saxon graves, swords are not common, and the really good, pattern-welded swords such as could shear armourer are rarer. That is to say that however men may have been liable to serve in war, the best equipment was confined to those who were royal or noble.

The history of the dynasty part (perhaps only a small part) of whose treasure was buried at Sutton Hoo also has echoes of the Beowulf world. Raedwald who is 'probably' buried at Sutton Hoo is the first East Anglian king of whom we know more than a name. He was the fourth Bretwaldas and Bede's account shows that on occasion his power stretched beyond the Humber (refer to back to story of Raedwald, Edwin and Aethelfrith).

On Raedwald's death (between 616 & 627) Raedwald was succeeded by another son, who was however soon murdered. After an interval Sigberd (another son or stepson) came to power after having been in exile in Gaul (France). He later abdicated to be followed by a king where relationship to him is unknown. Both were killed by Penda. Next came Raedwald's nephew Anna, he too was killed by Penda. Anna's brother and successor met the same fate at a different hand, he was killed by the Northumbrians while fighting for Penda at the battle on the Winwald in 655.

Much in this sparse and bloody tale is characteristic of seventh century kingship. Of six East Anglian Kings in less than 40 years died violently, the manner of Raedwald's death is unknown.

Dark Age Kings were often killed in battle (compare the kings of Middle Ages who were captured and ransomed). Oswald of Northumbria died in 642, his head and hands stuck up on stakes on the battlefield. It seems that any male member of the royal family widely defined, could succeed if he could get the required support and acceptance. This meant that a king's most dangerous enemies could be his own relations.

The game kings played in endless repeated wars was a harsh one. If the prize was authority over many other kings, great wealth, many followers and a blazing name, the likely end of it all was violent and very often early death. Raedwald had flirted with Christianity. His successors were the first Christian Kings of the East Angles. Raedwald became a kind of Christian presumably because that was the wish of his overlord Ethelbert.

What did Christianity offer such kings? Among other things, the assistance of divine power. One missionary message was that God could give victory. Oswald erected a cross before he fought the battle that made him king. When Bede says that Edwin

not only learned to hope for heavenly kingdoms unknown to his ancestors, but also won earthly kingdoms far larger than any of theirs.

It is a good Old Testament lesson; there was a good deal more to match Anglo Saxon experience in the early history of the Jews than there was in Roman Palestine. Christianity could affect some kings otherwise. Bede says that Egelbert of Essex was murdered (between 650 & 664) because he would forgive his enemies.

Bede tells a little of peace and of grandeur among kings. Most striking is his account of Edwin. Edwin, he says, kept such good peace that a woman with her newborn child could walk from sea to sea in safety. What seems another glimpse of Northumbrian ceremony comes in a story Bede tells of Oswald. On Easter Day the King was at dinner with a silver dish before him laden with good things. His minister whose duty it was to relieve the poor, came in to tell him that many poor men were asking for Alms outside. Oswald not only gave them his good food, but also ordered the silver dish (not improbably resembling one of those from Sutton Hoo) to be broken into little pieces for distribution among them.

The Anglo Saxon Age: A very short introduction
John Blair 1984

“From its beginnings English society included a military aristocracy, probably with some kind of territorial base. But in the early centuries the king’s followers or “thegns” were tied less to their estates than to the king himself. They were expected to accompany him, to witness his public actions. Aristocratic life was strongly communal, the great hall as place of good cheer, a harm in a dangerous world is a powerful image in Anglo-Saxon writing. Nobody puts it better than Bede, in the famous words which he gives a Northumbrian nobleman who is urging King Edwin to accept Christianity.

“This how the present life of man on earth, king, appears to me in comparison with that time which is unknown to us. You are sitting feasting with your aldermen and thegns in winter time, the fire is burning in the hearth in the middle of the hall and all inside is warm, while outside the wintry storms of rain and snow are raging and a sparrow flies swiftly through the hall. It enters in at one door and quickly flies out through the other. For the few moments it is inside, the storm and wintry tempest can not touch it, but after the briefest amount of calm, it flits from your sight, out of the wintry storm and into it again. So this life of man appears but for a moment; what follows or indeed what went before, we know not at all

Peace Weavers and Shield Maidens
Women in Early English Society

Kathleen Herbert

“A line or two in an old song, the gleam of Garnets set in a gold brooch that was last worn more than fourteen hundred years ago, the look and feel of a pattern-welded sword – these things can all cast a spell. They speak to us about ancient Germania.

In the enchanting world of the legends – the Peace Weaver and the Shield Maiden stand over against each other utterly unlike. To the right hand is the Shield Maiden, the fierce virgin who keeps all men at her spear’s length distant, or only comes to closer quarters with her spear or axe. On the left hand is the Peace Weaver – the royal bride who holds out her hands in welcome to bring warring tribes together in friendship at her wedding feast” p.7

Kathleen Herbert then goes on to recount the history of the first English girl to be recorded in European History. The account comes from PROCOPIUS. He was a high ranking civil servant in the Eastern Empire of the Emperor Justinian and wrote a History of the Gothic War 535-552. His source was from a member of a Frankish embassy and he is writing about events 533-548. King Theudebert I was King of the Eastern Franks (Belgium) and Procopius is writing about events in his lifetime not from some bygone age. The Eastern Roman Empire was looking for other against the Goths. The only Christian Allies were the Franks. The Franks wanted paying so to push their price up they boasted of how powerful they were and claimed they ruled Britain. Procopius could not call them liars, but the following story shows that the Franks were not as powerful as they claimed!

At the time that Procopius was writing the “Angiloz” had mostly settled in the eastern part of Britannia. However they had a close affinity (culture, custom and language) to the Varni peoples who lived to the east of the Franks. The Franks were dangerous neighbours. Fierce quick to take offence and powerful.

HERME GISCLUS KING of the VARNI (stick with it, I know the names are extreme!) wanted to protect his people after his death from the Franks. He was a widower and he had one son RADIGIS who was old enough to fight but not married (13 –15 years old?)

So Hermegisclus tries to weave peace for his son RADIGIS through two marriages.

He suggests that he marries the King of the Franks sister, while RADIGIS marries the English King’s sister.

“Which English King? The English were further away in Britain but they [VARNI] could know of them through traffic by sea [Trade] and also through their relations with the Varni. Their nearest King would be one of the East Anglian dynasty, the Wuffingas, whose royal hall was at Rendelsham and whose noble dead were buried at Sutton Hoo. The treasure found there draws the imagination to them”. P9 Note 6.

[See map of German Tribes]

The King of the Varni sent a large sum of gold to the English King's sister as a bride-gift. This was accepted by the King's sister and she and Radigis were pledged for life "the gold counted morally and legally as having had sexual intercourse with the bridegroom". (p.9)

King HERMEGISCLUS married the Frankish King's sister.

However King HERMEGISCLUS gets a premonition that he will soon die [the warning is given by a RAVEN a bird often seen as a harbinger [messenger] of death].

He realises that it may be safer for his son to marry his stepmother and keep the Franks friendly (they only lived across the River Rhine) than keep his promise to the English Princess.

Hermegisclus dies and Radigis (sounds like radishes?!) follows his father's advice and marries his stepmother.

A message was sent to the English Princess that the "wedding was off".

She took control well, supported by her relatives and people. She asked for an explanation and when she had it, she wanted REVENGE!!

"She collected ships and fighting men [Procopius says 400 ships and 100,000 warriors, either he had confused Germanic numerals or the Franks were exaggerating the northern hordes that they could bring out for or against the Eastern Roman Empire. Four ships like the one buried at Sutton Hoo with about a hundred warriors to handle them, would be a useful force).

And so the English with 'the island girl' at their head went back to invade Europe.

The story makes clear that though the girl took a younger brother to second her, she was the war leader who gave the orders. She had been woundingly insulted and had come to avenge her good name, but she was not blind to everything except her need to glut her rage. She told her men to stay where they landed until they had built a strong fort close to the Rhine mouth... she could not risk her ships burned or captured. Nor would she make the mistake of telling her troops to be cut off and trapped inland, unable to get back to the ships or get help from them.

[About twenty years earlier the Geating King Mygelac had been trapped like that at the Rhine mouth. He was cut down. His bones were kept on display among the Franks. His nephew, the famous hero, Beowulf, had to swim for his life.]

When she was ready to move she sent her brother to find the Varnian forces. They were encamped not far from the shore. The English gave battle at once, trounced the Varni and killed a lot of them, the rest including the young King fled. The English chased them for a while, but had the sense to turn back to their camp to report. If they expected to be thanked, they had a shock. Their leader gave the sharpest

tongue-lashing. She sent out a hand picked force to hunt Radigis, telling them not to come back without him.

... they found him lurking in a tract of densely forested land, tied him up and dragged him to his betrothed. He was shaking. He was very young, he had just been defeated. Perhaps he was wounded, certainly he was exhausted, hungry and manhandled. It was not easy to be heroic. He waited for the girl to curse him, then tell her men she wanted him killed.

She asked him quietly why he had broken the engagement that he had asked her to make, she had not been unfaithful or done him any wrong. Why had he deserted her for another woman?"

King Radigis 'went to pieces' pleads for mercy and promises to send his stepmother and wife back to her own people. The English girl became Queen of the Varni. This is how the story ends. We do not know if they lived happily, but we do know that the alliance between the English and the Varni survived for a long time.

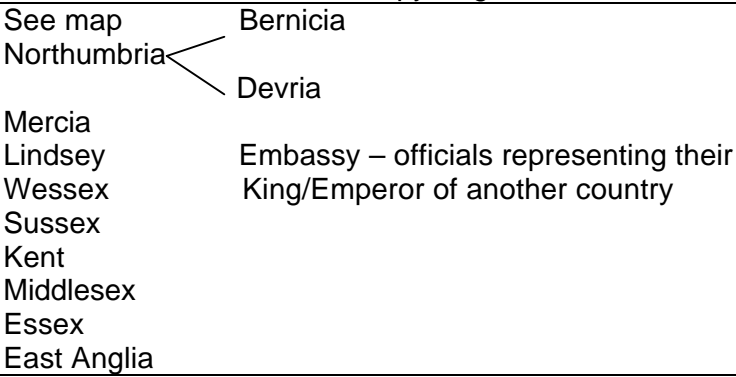
Chronology

AD

- 55-400 Roman Occupation of Britain. Military units of Germans allied to the Romans are involved in the occupation of Britain.
- 98 Tacitus a Roman historian describes the continental ancestors of the Anglo Saxons in his book "Germania" Customs. A general survey of the people, their religious customs and social life
- 98 Tacitus was the first historian to study German lands and the Germanic tribes. His perspective is that of a Roman and he writes in Latin. His bias is that of a civilised Roman writing about the Germanic Barbarians. However his writings tally with other evidence we have on this period e.g. Archaeological
- 300-450 Decline and fall of the Western Roman Empire
- 410 Roman Emperor Honorius refuses to help Roman Britain against barbarians (Pict and German invaders) Britannia becomes independent.
- 449 According to tradition independent British Authorities invite Germanic settlement for the first time.
- 450-500 Germanic rebellions and the start of early Anglo Saxon Kingdoms. More invaders arrive from the sea.
- 500-600 consolidation of early Anglo Saxon Kingdoms
- 535-552 AD Procopius History of the Gothic wars describes the adventures of a jilted English Princess.
- 625-7 Death of King Raedwald, High King over all the Anglo-Saxon Kings. King of the East Angles – Mound 1 possibly his grave.
- 627-8 King Earpwald Raedwald's Christian successor
- 635 Death of King Sigbert in Battle against the Mercian King Penda (possibly buried at Ely Cathedral)
- 635 King Egric killed in the same battle as King Sigbert
- 653 King Anna died, devout Christian buried at Blythburgh (32 km from Sutton Hoo)
- 654 King Aethelhere killed 15th Nov in battle against the King of Northumbria. Battle fought near the River Winswaed which was swollen by heavy rains many were drowned and Aethelhere's body was never found.
- 655 Battle of Winwaed (see above). End of Pagan kingdoms in England. Northumbria becomes the supreme Anglo Saxon Kingdom.
- 655-750 Establishment of stable Anglo-Saxon states in lowland England
- 673-735 Life of the venerable Bede who wrote "The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation". Our only written source of information about the establishment of the early Anglo Saxon Kingdoms.
- 700-750 "Beowulf" the epic English poem was thought to be written. This has a description of the burial of Beowulf King of the Scandinavian called the Geatas [Geats]. Finds at Sutton Hoo echo strongly the funeral rites described in the poem – This area is still keenly debated by Historians and scholars of Anglo Saxon.
- 757-797 Reign of King Offa of Mercia
- Mercia now supreme Anglo Saxon Kingdom. King Offa internationally respected. Close links between English Anglo Saxon Kingdoms and the European Court of Emperor Charlamagne Holy Roman Emperor who rules France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Italy.
- 787 First recorded Viking raid on Britain

- 1066 Last of the English Kings Harold II dies at the Battle of Hastings. England now ruled by William of Normandy and his descendants.
- 1560's Elizabeth I grants her astrologer Dr Die permission for a fee to dig the mounds at Sutton Hoo for treasure
- 1904 Oseberg ship burial discovered in Norway
- 1938 A group of Archaeologists become interested in the Sutton Hoo site. Mrs EM Pretty JP on whose estates the mounds were situated invites Mr Basil Brown to investigate. [Legend has it the choice of Mound was decided by spectral figures of ancient warriors which Mrs Pretty saw on the site]. However the Archaeological team opened Mounds 2 and 3 first (see map)
- 1939 Archaeologists opened up the tallest Mound No. 1 on the map. Traces of a ship were discovered and at the bottom of the trench the Sutton Hoo Hoard.
- 1939 September World War II starts. Treasures taken to British Museum for safekeeping.

GLOSSARY

AD	Anno Domini – (In the Year of our Lord). Bede related events in England to how many years since Christ was born. This system was later used by all of Western World to mark events e.g. 2002 AD (two thousand and two years since the official birth of Jesus)
Anglo Saxons	Euro/German tribes who occupy England 450 - 750
Anglo Saxon Kingdoms	See map  <p>Bernicia Deuria</p> <p>Mercia Lindsey Wessex Sussex Kent Middlesex Essex East Anglia</p> <p>Embassy – officials representing their King/Emperor of another country</p>
Archaeology	Use of Science to study historical remains
Aristocratic	The elite in a warrior society. Wealthy Ruling Class
Astrologer	Caster of horoscopes
Bede	Monk who wrote the “Ecclesiastical History of the English people
Beowulf	Early English Poem
Bretwalda	Chief King of the Britons
Cauldron	Very large metal container
Christian	Believer that Jesus Christ was the Son of God and it is through him one will get to Heaven.
Dynasty	Family of Kings e.g. Wuffings of East Anglia (House of Windsor)
Ecclesiastical	Christian Church. Bede’s history was not about the History of the English, but a History of how England became Christian
Emperor	Rules more than one nation state
Geats	Danish people mentioned in Beowulf
Goths	A collection of German Tribes who fought against the Roman Empires. Pagan in religion
Harness	Tack used on horses e.g. bridle
Healhweru/Household Troops	Loyal followers of King or leader protect King and carry out his wishes
Hide	Unit of land
Jarrow	Small town in Northumberland where there was a Monastery in the 8 th Century. Home to Bede
King	Ruler of a people or territory
Latin	Language of the Roman Empire and it became the official language of the Western Roman Church
Pagan	Non Christian
Reign	Period of time a king rules
Roman Empire	By 500 AD this had been split into two. The Eastern Roman Empire based at Byzantium (modern day Istanbul in Turkey) and the Western Empire based on Rome. The Western Empire was now fragmented, but its successor was the Roman Catholic Church which by 700 AD dominated the

	whole of Europe.
Scabbard	Protective holder for sword or dagger
Sceptre	Symbol of kingship carried by king usually in shape of a wand/batton
Seax	Long dagger
Standard	Symbol of Authority carried ahead of King/leader in procession/battle
Standard Bearer	Follower of the leader, he carried the Standard
Thane	An Anglo Saxon Lord
The Franks	People who lived in the area we now call North Eastern France/Belgium
Thrall	Slave
Varni	Tribe that lived East of the Franks in Europe. Strong cultural links with the English that settled in Britain as both groups originally came from South Jutland.
Venerable	Respected

Reading List

Following the advice of my old university professor on how to start reading for a new topic, (which was to start with a text which can be understood by children, his phrase was the “Ladybird View of History”). The following reading list starts with this type of text, though in the case of Jenny Webb’s excellent “Farewell the King” it is a text written by children.

*"Farewell the King"	By Jenny Webb and the children of Sandlings Primary School. Pub. Barny Books ISBN No. 1 903172 08 X
*SHCP What is History? 2 Detective Work The Mystery of the Empty Grave	Pub Schools Council Publications 1976
* Beowulf A New Translation	Seamus Heaney Fuher & Baber 1999 ISBN 0-571-20113-x
*Ecclesiastical History of Britain	Bede Penguin Classics 1999 ISBRO 0-14-044565 – x
*Sutton Hoo	The National Trust Text Seven J Plunkett/Map David Lucas 2002 ISBN 1-84359-009-3
*The Age of Sutton Hoo	Ed Martin Carver Boydell ISBN 0-35115-330
Anglo Saxon England	Sir Fr Stenton
The Isles	Norman Davies
*Britain in the First Millenium	Edward James
Anglo Saxons	HR Lyon
*The Anglo Saxons	Ed James Campbell
Early Medieval Europe	R Collins
From Roman Britain to Norman England	PH Sawyer
The Formation of England 550-1042	HPR Finberg
*The Origins of beowulf and the Pre- Viking Kingdom of East Anglia	Sam Newton Boydell & Brewer ISBN 0-8 5991 –472 –0
Anglo Saxon Thegn AD 449-1066	Mark Harrison. Illustrated by Gerry Embleton Osprey History ISBN 1-84176-279-2
*Oxford Companion to English Literature	Ed Margaret Drabble 1984
Anglo Saxon Poetry	Trans & Ed SAJ Bradley Everyman ISBN 0-460-87507-8
*Anglo Saxon Age A very short introduction	John Blair Oxford Books were the ones found most useful in preparing this work

*Peace Weavers and Shield Maidens Women in Early English Society	Kathleen Herbet 1997. Anglo Saxon Books ISBN 1-898281-11-4
Women in Anglo Saxon England	Christine Fell Blackwell 1984