

# Antiquity

## A Quarterly Review of Archaeology

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VOL. XIV No. 53

MARCH 1940

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### Editorial Notes

ONLY very rarely is a great Treasure kept intact through the Ages and eventually made known in such a happy way as was the case at Sutton Hoo, in Suffolk, last year. In this instance Fortune showed special discernment in choosing Mrs E. M. Pretty as the instrument through whom this remarkable revelation was made known. Now that the work has been carried through to a successful conclusion it is well to remember that she was the initiator and controller throughout.



It is not the first time in the history of British archaeology that knowledge has been signally advanced by the enterprise of an enlightened land-owner—far from it; indeed British archaeology has been largely built up on foundations so laid. Not always, however, was their enthusiasm well served or well directed; and never did it reap such a reward as this, the finest archaeological discovery ever made in Great Britain, perhaps in Europe. This country, indeed the whole world, owes a deep debt of gratitude to Mrs Pretty for the initiative without which this great discovery would never have been made, and for her public-spirited generosity in presenting the whole of the finds, intact and undivided, to the nation. The British Museum is unquestionably the proper home for such a remarkable treasure.

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Through the courtesy of Mr C. W. Phillips, who directed the excavations for Mrs Pretty, one of the Editors of ANTIQUITY (Mr O. G. S. Crawford) was present, together with his Ordnance Survey colleague Mr W. F. Grimes, during the week when most of the grave-goods were found. It was for both the experience of a life-time. In return both did what they could, by photography and technical methods, to assist the work.

The excavator, if he is properly trained, and has the necessary imagination, can get an intellectual thrill from discoveries that mean nothing to the man in the street. A few bits of human skull from a gravel-pit or cave enlarge for him the history of the human race; post-holes that Victorian excavators would never have seen at all become in his hands the farms and courts of prehistoric Britain. He does not for this need finds of great intrinsic or artistic value, but neither on the other hand does he despise them; and he is sufficiently human, usually, to enjoy a successful treasure-hunt as much as anyone, and perhaps to appreciate it more variously.

In the Saxon ship was buried, amid much else, gold and silver worth a fortune. But it was not mere useless bullion (like the bank reserves of modern states); it consisted of objects of great artistic value. As we watched emerging daily from the earth things that we saw were unique we felt that we were present at the unveiling of history, and that the history of our own country. There were great moments that none of us who were present will ever forget—such as the lifting of the silver plate, that for days had lain there half covering a silver basin (PLATE XVIII). We knew that exciting things were waiting for the uncovering—when the great moment came we were not disappointed (pages 69-70 and PLATE XIV).

The finding of the gold clasps was another wonderful moment. As always with gold objects, they were in perfect condition, without spot or tarnish. They are unique, and it was a happy chance they should be found on a day when we had visitors from the British Museum. The same evening there came, as a fitting climax to a crowded day, what was perhaps the most unexpected discovery of all. For some time we had been puzzled by a tantalizing patch of purple dust, sure

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harbinger of silver. It developed into a dome-shaped lump which Mr Grimes undercut and placed on a zinc tray. He deposited this on the grass outside the barrow and proceeded to take away the much corroded outer fragments. When at last he lifted the top we saw a bright silver bowl, base upwards, in perfect condition, and under this was yet another bowl. In all eight were thus uncovered, each with different ornamentation inside (PLATE XIX). That same day we removed the iron stand and silver tray, the iron-bound bucket, the gold clasps, and the sword.



Each day of that exciting week yielded some first-rate find, often of a type unknown before. As we worked along the keel we *knew* that under those mouldy-looking lumps of decayed wood lay hidden things of priceless historic and artistic value. We anticipated the finding of a sword, shield, helmet, and drinking-horns, and we were not disappointed. Things we did not expect were found—the purse, silver bowls and tray, for instance, and later the axe and suit of chain mail. It was clear that more would be found when the final examination in the laboratories of the British Museum was completed. Both the silver basin and one of the bronze hanging-bowls led to new discoveries (‘ Vicky ’, and the fish).



It is possible that there may yet be a few more finds when laboratory work can be resumed. For alas! within a few days of the conclusion of this stage of the excavations, the investigations were brought to an abrupt end by war. The whole of the finds had to be given first-aid treatment and then reinterred in a place of safety. Needless to say no anxiety need now be felt on their account, provided peace is declared during the present decade. But the preparation of any adequate report was rendered very difficult, and to that extent the accounts given in this number (and all work and study devoted to them so far) must be regarded as provisional. There was not time to take proper studio-photographs of the objects. The work will of course be resumed at the conclusion of the war, and we can only await that longed-for day with eager impatience.



The decision of the British Museum authorities to run no risks, and to leave all the finds undisturbed in their present repository, is

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obviously the right one. The iron objects will certainly keep without deterioration for a year or two ; and the perishable ones (of wood, cloth, leather) have no doubt been duly sealed.



A few points of general interest may be touched on here. Whose grave was it? Professor Chadwick deals with this problem. Here it may be stated that, though the whole treasure obviously represents the funeral obsequies of a king, a body was not interred in the ship. Upon this view all who took part in the excavation (including the present writer) are agreed. Had it been otherwise, *some* remains, however decayed, would certainly have been found, and some purely personal articles. Soil-acids would not dissolve absolutely everything so as to leave no trace of a body ; some dust or silhouette-mark in the sand (see ANTIQUITY VII, 468-71) would surely survive, and the teeth.



Then as to the date. The coins have not proved as helpful as we hoped. Their evidence is based, not upon the sure foundations of regnal years (except in fixing an upper limit of date), but upon the shifting evidence of style ; and it must therefore be given no greater weight than the rest. For the survival of such a treasure we have to thank the deep burial in sand ; it is this that has kept it safe from grave-robbers. We know that Dr Dee made an effort in this direction (p. 11), most fortunately without success. Indeed, given the collapsible nature of sand, it would not be possible to get at the treasure without first removing as huge a mass as was in fact removed by the present excavators. Any less heroic measures would merely have resulted in a cave-in.



It remains to thank those who have made possible the publication of the various accounts printed in this number, and first of all Mr C. W. Phillips for his on the actual excavation. Then we acknowledge with gratitude the kindness of Sir John Forsdyke, Director of the British Museum, and the Trustees, for allowing us the use of some blocks to illustrate a few of the most outstanding finds. Here we may note that in the December number of the *British Museum Quarterly* (which we strongly recommend our readers to purchase) nearly 30 pages, accompanied by 11 plates, are devoted to accounts of the Finds from Sutton

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Hoo. These and the various articles which we print supplement each other. A further account, giving full details of the excavation and of the ship, will be published in the *Antiquaries Journal*. Special thanks are due to Mr T. D. Kendrick, Keeper of the Department of the British Museum concerned, for his contributions, and for his help and kindness in many other ways.



In conclusion we have endeavoured to illustrate the accounts which follow by an adequate number of illustrations, for the occasion requires unusual treatment.



We must now refer to the large number of letters received recently from our subscribers, many of whom have written specially to express their pleasure that ANTIQUITY will still be published. They have been extraordinarily kind in other ways. Their faith in us has been shown by advance subscriptions for years yet to come, and of offers of practical help should such be needed. This is a great encouragement, and though future prospects are not too favourable we hope that we shall survive the difficulties which may have to be faced.



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