

The Anglo-Saxon Treasures at Sutton Hoo



In 1937, Edith Pretty became curious about **burial mounds** on her property in a place called Sutton Hoo, near Woodbridge in Suffolk, England. She hired help from Basil Brown, an **archaeologist**, to dig into the mounds. Brown began **excavating** the site in 1938 and by 1939, he had uncovered something amazing. The discovery was soon taken over by experts from the British Museum, who realised the site's importance. Although we do not know for definite, it is thought that the treasures found belonged to an important Anglo-Saxon king.

Who Were the Anglo-Saxons?

The Anglo-Saxons were a group of people from modern-day Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands, who settled in Britain between 410 and 1066, after the decline of the Roman Empire. They established a number of small kingdoms across England. By 556, Britain was divided into seven kingdoms: Northumbria, Mercia, Wessex, Sussex, Kent, Essex and East Anglia.

The Anglo-Saxons spoke Old English, which evolved into the English language used today. They were known for their metalwork, including the Sutton Hoo treasures.



What Was Found at Sutton Hoo?

The treasures found at Sutton Hoo are one of the most exciting discoveries ever made in England and they tell us a great deal about the Anglo-Saxons.

At the heart of the discovery was a large longship buried under the mound. The ship was about 27 metres (88 feet) long and was a tomb that had once had a person buried carefully inside.

The abundance of wealth and items found at the burial site suggested it must have belonged to a king. Many **historians** believe that this was the burial site of King Rædwald of East Anglia, although they cannot be certain. King Rædwald was a 'Bretwalda' – a powerful Anglo-Saxon king who ruled over many kingdoms.

His kingdom of East Anglia was thought to have its seat at Rendlesham, just over four miles upriver from Sutton Hoo.

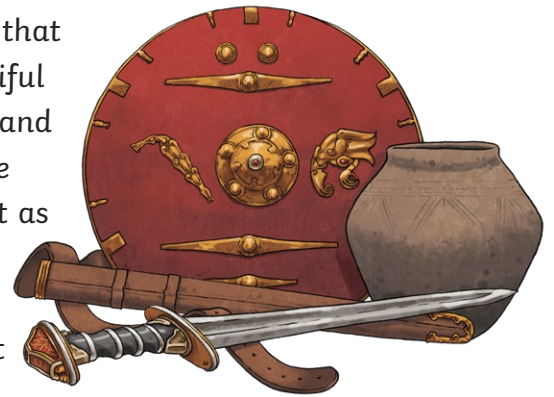




The magnificent Sutton Hoo helmet was made of iron, gold and bronze.

Among the treasures found in the tomb were several beautiful and valuable items, including weapons, jewellery and armour. The most famous **artefact** found was a helmet, known as the Sutton Hoo helmet. Made of iron and decorated with gold and bronze, the helmet is one of the best examples of Anglo-Saxon metalwork. It is highly decorated, with images of animals, battle scenes and symbols of Woden (also known as Odin), the Pagan god of war. The helmet wasn't just for protection in battle – it was also a symbol of power and authority.

Along with the helmet, **archaeologists** found many other items that belonged to the person buried in the ship: a sword with a beautiful gold and garnet hilt, a large shield boss (the centre of a shield) and gold shoulder clasps, all of which were carefully placed with the body. The positioning of these items was particularly significant as they showed that the person buried was an important leader, wealthy and generous. Study of the sword has suggested that the owner was left-handed as the patterns of wear indicate that it was worn on the right side and held with the left hand.



Why Are the Sutton Hoo Treasures Important?

What makes the treasures found at Sutton Hoo so fascinating is that they show the Anglo-Saxons were connected to other cultures in Europe. Some of the items found in the tomb came from places as far away as Scandinavia and Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul, the capital of Türkiye). This means the Anglo-Saxons **traded** and interacted with people from all over Europe. As well as this, the discovery showed that the burial was from a time when the Anglo-Saxons were changing from Pagan beliefs to Christianity. During his reign, King Rædwald converted to Christianity but it is thought that he never fully embraced the new religion. He is known to have kept a temple with two **altars**, one dedicated to the earlier 'old' gods, such as Woden, and the other to his new religion of Christianity.



Today, the treasures from Sutton Hoo are on display at the British Museum, where people can admire the skillfulness involved and learn more about this fascinating period of history. The Sutton Hoo burial continues to capture people's imagination and is a reminder of the incredible mysteries that lie beneath the earth, waiting to be discovered.



Glossary

altar: A flat-topped structure that is used in some religious ceremonies.

archaeologist: A person who studies the buildings, graves, tools and other objects of people who lived in the past.

artefact: An object that has been made by a person, especially one that is of historical interest.

burial mounds: Mounds of earth and stones built over a grave.

excavating: Carefully removing earth from an area in order to find buried remains.

historian: An expert in or student of history, particularly that of a specific time period.

traded: Bought and sold goods and services.



altar

