



# THE SUTTON HOO RESEARCH TRUST

Director of Research Project:  
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From the Office of:

The Research Director

16th May, 1986

J. Miller, Esq.,  
Brackenbury House,  
Felixstowe,  
IP11 7NF.

Dear John,

## Sutton Hoo

I enclose a draft of the "Valuation" section of the package which I am preparing to support the case for Acceptance in lieu. It lacks a figure for the cost of a recently sold (or insured) medieval manuscript, which I am waiting for from the British Library and Christie's. The calculation supposes a price of £1,100 per folio at present

I would be most grateful for your comments before any of this is made official or public. The other parts of the package are (1) a letter of offer from the owner, (2) Robert Pretty's offer, (3) Sutton Hoo site guide and (4) A map showing all areas and locations referred to. The documents are to be contained in an illustrated wallet.

Yours sincerely,

M.O.H. Carver

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### Council

Appointed by the Society of Antiquaries of London: Prof. J.D. Evans (Chairman), Prof. B.W. Cunliffe, Prof. P.A. Rahtz, R.M. Robbins CBE (Treasurer).  
Appointed by the British Museum: Sir David Wilson (Deputy Chairman), David Attenborough CBE, Mrs Leslie Webster.  
Appointed by Suffolk County Council: Dr. S.E. West.

## SUTTON HOO - A VALUATION

### DESCRIPTION

The ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE at Sutton Hoo lies on sandy cultivated land across the river Deben from Woodbridge. It has been thoroughly evaluated in a three-year investigation sponsored by the Sutton Hoo Research Trust.

It comprises:-

- a settlement and ceremonial centre of the PREHISTORIC PERIOD, which endured from 3000 BC to the Iron Age. It was likely to have been the largest and longest lived (and thus probably the most important) prehistoric site in Suffolk. No part of this extensive settlement (14 hectares) is currently visible above ground. It exists as an underground matrix of ditches, pits and sockets for timber posts, filled with fragments of pottery and flint implements, together with charred seeds and pollen of cereals and other plants. This buried settlement is now covered by turf in one sector (Area A) and elsewhere by arable land. Where the ground has been ploughed, the flint and pottery have been broken and thrown up onto the surface, where many thousands of fragments may be found.
- THE ROYAL ANGLO-SAXON BURIAL GROUND, the earliest relating to English kings and the only one known from the pagan period, 6-7th C AD. Sixteen burial mounds are still readily visible, of which four have been explored. One of these (mound 1 on the plan) contained the remains of a timber vessel 90 feet long, in the centre of which was a burial chamber containing an incomparable treasure, now in the British Museum. This burial mound is thought to have been the memorial for Raedwald, King of East Anglia from about 580 to 625 AD. The burial mounds lie within a cemetery containing an estimated 1500 other graves of the same period, 17 of which have been so far excavated. The whole cemetery extends for about 4

hectares and its eastern edge lies beneath arable land. The site of Sutton Hoo is judged to contain -

- the earliest known contact with the English kings
- the most concentrated evidence for pagan religion
- the most comprehensive evidence for the relationship between England and Scandinavia at the beginning of English history.

### VALUATION

As it stands today, Sutton Hoo is probably the most precious archaeological resource we have. As a PREHISTORIC SETTLEMENT AND CEREMONIAL CENTRE it rates amongst the top ten in England, with Stonehenge, Fen Gate and Raunds. As a DARK AGE CEMETERY, it is unique in England and famous throughout Europe, rating with Upsala (Sweden), S. Denis (France), Jelling (Denmark), and Monza (Italy) as containing the evidence for the foundation of the modern European kingdoms. It is naturally difficult to put a price on a cultural resource of this kind, since it is irreplaceable and not duplicated or replicated elsewhere.

The overall value of the site can be computed as the sum of its assets, and these are considerable. However the realisation of most of these assets depends on excavation. The right to excavate is currently vested in the Department of Environment, English Heritage, the Pretty Family Trust and the British Museum. The Pretty Family Trust are willing to make over the right to excavate to the new owner, provided that the new owner is English Heritage or the British Museum. The right to the finds is vested in the British Museum. The value put upon Sutton Hoo therefore depends on who the owner is.

### As an Asset for Private Ownership

As farmland, the value of Sutton Hoo is unexceptional and some investment would be required to remove the mounds which are currently an obstacle to cultivation. Cultivation and grazing

are also inhibited over that part of the site which is a Scheduled Monument. A more appropriate use would be as an amenity, and analogy with a country park suggests a current valuation at about £5000 an acre. To a private owner the site of Sutton Hoo represents a realisable asset of about £50,000.

#### As an Asset to English Heritage

The value of the site immediately increases when the owner has the right to excavate it, as would be the case with English Heritage (the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission). Since the finds are dedicated to the British Museum, the value here is provided largely by the historical information the site contains, a value by no means easy to assess in monetary terms. The most apposite parallel would seem to be provided by medieval manuscripts containing historical data, which do occasionally come on the market. A recent example was

which fetched at auction on at Christie's. The Sutton Hoo archive contains a very large number of folio equivalents, and its historical information is some centuries earlier and from an otherwise very sparsely documented period. Moreover the value of a manuscript which has not yet been read - which is the status of the Sutton Hoo evidence - is considerably higher than of one which has already been transcribed.

If every Anglo-Saxon barrow (15) is reckoned as equivalent to 30 folios, every Anglo-Saxon grave (1500) equivalent to 1, and a single folio is allowed for every 10 square metres of the prehistoric site, then the total asset accruing for English Heritage would be equivalent to 5950 folios of original historic manuscripts. Such computation is arbitrary, but can scarcely be valued at less than , even if no account were taken the enhanced rarity described above.

It is appreciated that in order to realise all or part of such assets in the public domain, excavation is necessary which is itself a more lengthy and technical procedure than transcribing

manuscripts. Total excavation may not be immediately desirable, and indeed the current assessment (the Sutton Hoo Research Trust's Project Design) recommends that a quarter of the site would give a range of historical information appropriate to our century, the remainder being left for future generations and improved techniques. Bearing in mind the cost of excavation (£1.4 M) the immediately realisable asset to the new owner, English Heritage, can be reckoned at about £350,00 as a minimum.

#### As an Asset for the British Museum

Finds from the site are to become the property of the British Museum, under a covenant made by Sutton Hoo's original benefactor, Mrs. Edith Pretty, OBE, JP. The value which accrues to them may be assessed on the basis of the insurance taken out on part of the 1939 treasure when it was recently lent for display in Stockholm (£9.7 m). Assuming that there has been some interference with all the remaining barrows which have yet to be excavated (11 in number), and that they were less rich in the first place (neither of which is known for certain) a minimum value of 30% of this figure may be placed on each. This produces a minimum potential asset of £30.91 m. Assuming that only 4 of the barrows are excavated under the Sutton Hoo Research Trust's Project Design, and assuming also a contribution to the excavation by the British Museum of £200,000, their immediately realisable asset is £8.63 million. This can be added to the immediate benefit which will be bestowed on the Nation by its acquisition of the site of Sutton Hoo.

#### Conclusion

As real estate the site of Sutton Hoo is of limited value; but the possession of the real estate, combined with the right to excavate, raises the value considerably in the hands of an owner who has that right. When considered with the value put upon the finds, it can be seen that potential value to the English people as a whole (but only to them and not to any individual) is rightly very great. Even these estimates, relying as they must on analogy, do not express the true worth of Sutton Hoo to Britain.

The opportunity to acquire this site, at a compensation to its present owner equivalent only to part of the asset immediately realisable by English Heritage, would seem to be advantageous. It should be explained that this acquisition carries with it minimal liabilities. The cost of excavation has already been included in the exchange, and the cost of upkeep is allowed for by arrangements already initiated by the Sutton Hoo Research Trust. The cost of caretaking the site which include mowing and guardianship, is small and is met by the revenue from its many visitors from all over the world. The scheme is managed by the Sutton Hoo Society, a charitable organisation presided over by the Duke of Edinburgh. It is likely that the management will become still more effective as the potential of the site is gradually realised by excavation. The new owner need therefore expect no financial burden from his acquisition.

cc to John Evans  
John Miller  
David Wilson  
Rosemary Cramp

# SUTTON HOO - A TABLE OF ASSETS

## Value to private owner

<u>Asset</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Basis of Computation</u>	<u>Potential value</u>	<u>Immediately realisable asset</u>
			£	£
As real estate	10 acres (4 ha)	County Park at £5,000 an acre	50,000	50,000
		<u>Value to Private Owner:</u>		<u>50,000</u>
As historic archive	15 barrows 1500 graves 4 ha prehistory	Historic manuscript at £ a folio  Less 75% unexcavated Less cost of excavation (£1.4 m) Less cost of upkeep (nil)	6.8 m  1.7 m    	   350,000 350,000
		<u>Value to English Heritage:</u>		<u>350,000</u>
Objects	11 barrows each containing 30% of 1939 treasure	Insurance figure for 1939 Treasure (£9.7 m in 1981) Less 7 barrows left unexcavated Less contribution to costs of excavation (£200,000)	30.1 m   	 8.83 m 8.63 m
		<u>Value to British Museum:</u>		<u>8.63 m</u>
		TOTAL VALUE immediately accruing to the Nation:		8.98 m
		POTENTIAL VALUE accruing to the Nation:		£36.90 m
		COST to the Nation:		£350,000