

## THE SNAPE BOAT-GRAVE

By R. L. S. BRUCE-MITFORD, F.S.A.

Snape is an East Suffolk village on the north bank of the tidal estuary of the Alde, about five miles west of the small coastal town of Aldeburgh (Fig. 1). Here in 1862 and 1863 a pagan burial-ground was partially excavated.<sup>1</sup> It lay exactly half a mile due east of Snape church, immediately west of the point at which a minor road, running north and south past Snape Priory, crosses

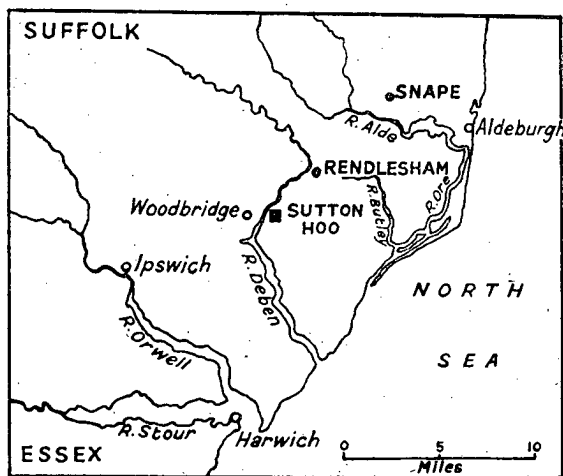
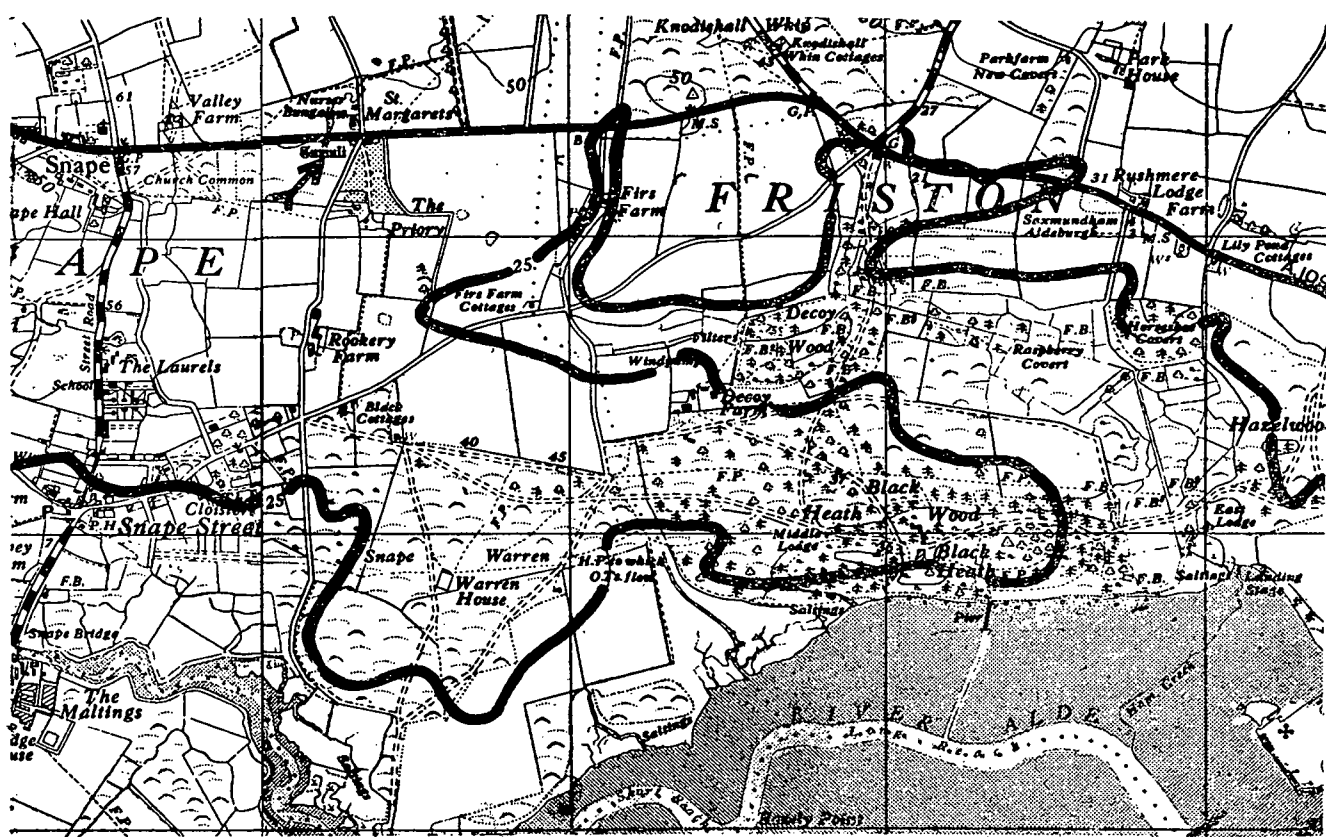


FIG. 1.—Sketch map showing the positions of Snape, Rendlesham and Sutton Hoo.

<sup>1</sup> The primary accounts of the 1862 excavations are those of Francis Francis in *The Field, the Country Gentleman's Newspaper*, January 17th, 1863, pp. 61-2 and January 24th, 1863, pp. 74-5; Septimus Davidson (*Society of Antiquaries Proceedings*, Second Series, vol. II, January 8th, 1863, pp. 177-82) and Dr. N. F. Hele, *Notes About Aldeburgh*, 1870, pp. 24-9. Secondary accounts based on these are those of the Rev. H. M. Scarth in *Archæological Journal*, xx, 1863, pp. 188-91 and Reginald Smith in the *Victoria County History, Suffolk*, vol. I, 1911, pp. 325-9. The further excavations of 1863 in the flat ground around the barrows, which produced remains of forty urns, are described by Francis Francis in *Archæological Journal*, xx, 1863, pp. 373-4. The cemetery is recorded in R. G. Collingwood and J. N. L. Myres, *Roman Britain and the Saxon Settlements* (Oxford History of England, vol. I) Map VII and p. 390.



(From the Ordnance Survey Map by permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office).

FIG. 2.—Map of Snape and the Alde Estuary, showing the position of the Saxon burial-ground (indicated by an arrow). The 25-ft. contour line is thickened to emphasise the coombe by which the boat was no doubt brought to the place of burial. (Scale  $2\frac{1}{2}$ -ins.—1 mile).

the west-east road from Snape to Aldeburgh (O.S. map reference 403593). (Fig. 2).

The burials excavated in 1862 and 1863 were immediately north of the Snape-Aldeburgh road, and their site would seem to be to-day largely contained by the enclosure marked on the Ordnance maps as 'St. Margaret's'—a private house—which lies in the north-west angle of the cross-roads. South of the road on the Ordnance Survey 2½ and 6-in. maps two tumuli are marked opposite St. Margaret's (Fig. 2). This agrees with the contemporary accounts which state that the Snape-Aldeburgh road was driven 'between five or six<sup>2</sup> large barrows which stand on either side of the road' ('a matter of wonderment to the simple peasant—who in these latitudes is remarkably simple indeed—and by reason of the large size of some of them, to the more educated traveller who may wend that way . . . the road had run so close that it had cut off a considerable slice of one of them').<sup>3</sup> The two south of the road were not excavated by the 1862-3 diggers, but are said by them to have been opened, together with the three that lay north of the road, some 20 or 30 years since 'by some gentlemen who were supposed by the inhabitants to have come from London'. Of the waggon-load of vases and other things then said to have been taken away, nothing can now be traced. It may be that this earlier excavation came about in connection with the construction of the road, which besides separating the five barrows must have disturbed a considerable number of cremation urns in the flat ground between.<sup>4</sup> The field on the south of the road has this year (1953) been ploughed for the first time within memory. The easternmost of its two barrows, the one at the cross roads, remains untouched; the other has disappeared, though when I visited the site in May it was still just possible to recognise the place of it in the plough, some 50 yards to the west of the surviving mound. I was unable to find any recognisable remains of the three barrows to the north of the road, either in the garden of St. Margaret's or the adjacent ground to the west.

Mr. Reginald Smith in the *Victoria County History*, repeating earlier accounts, says that the site lies 'halfway between Snape and Aldeburgh, but rather nearer Snape'. It is in fact quite close to

<sup>2</sup> Septimus Davidson, the owner of the land and leader of the excavators, speaks of 'at least eight or ten tumuli on Snape Common' but later comments that 'some of these are not exceeding six or seven feet in diameter'. (*Proc. Soc. Ant.*, 2 Ser., II, 177).

<sup>3</sup> Francis Francis in *The Field*, January 17th, 1863.

<sup>4</sup> The majority of the urns excavated to the north of the road in 1863 are said to have been 'within a short distance of the hedge to Southward', that is to say, close to the road, which seems to have passed through the middle of the grave-field.

Snape, at the spot where the barrows referred to are shown on the map (Fig. 2). Its proximity to Snape Priory has been confirmed by a number of letters to the writer from local residents and from members of the Swinburne family, who lived in the Priory, where the finds, with the exception of the gold ring, remained until they were presented to the Museum of the Aldeburgh Literary Society at Aldeburgh apparently about the year 1911.<sup>5</sup> The site is on the 50-ft. contour-line and the cemetery comprised an urn-field in which stood at least five tumuli. Beneath one of these, already robbed, the excavators found the first boat-grave of the Anglo-Saxon period to be recorded in England. In this the immediate interest of the site, and the reason for its present re-examination, lie.

The estuary winds along the vale below at distances from the mounds nowhere very much less than a mile at high tide; but, as in the case of the Sutton Hoo burial-ground (which lies only 9 miles to the south-west, Fig. 1), a coombe runs in towards the site (Fig. 2); Francis Francis, whose contemporary account will be quoted later, evidently thought it peculiar that so large a boat (its length was 48-ft. as traced in the ground) should be buried so far from the water, for he says, by way of explanation, 'there is no doubt that the Alde, which is navigable to smacks and colliers for a considerable distance higher up, did at one time, before it was confined by river walls etc., run within probably some one-third mile of the spot'. This is broadly correct, since there is no doubt that the water-level in these estuaries at that time rose appreciably higher than to-day.<sup>6</sup> But allowing for this, and taking the coombe into account, it still seems unlikely that in pagan Saxon times a boat could have been brought by water at all close to the burial-ground. Perhaps it might have got as far up the coombe as the present site of Firs Farm Cottages (Fig. 2), i.e. to within 800 yards of it; or if one could assume that the tide then rose as high as the present day 25-ft. contour, that would be to within about 700 yards. A very considerable effort of organised man-handling must have been required to get the boat from there to its place of burial.

#### THE DISCOVERY

Of the various accounts of the excavations listed in footnote 1, Reginald Smith's in the *Victoria County History* is a careful and judicious condensation of the rather confused earlier accounts, and its

<sup>5</sup> At the time of writing the Aldeburgh Museum is disbanded and the Snape finds are temporarily in the custody of the Ipswich Museum. The gold ring is in the British Museum.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the water-level in the Suffolk estuaries in early times see 'Saxon Rendlesham', *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, xxiv (1949), p. 246.

substance need not be repeated here. But Professor Birger Nerman, the Director of the National Historical Museum in Stockholm, has cast doubts upon the association of the ring, claw-beaker and other finds with the boat,<sup>7</sup> and so upon the existence of a boat-grave at Snape at all, and these doubts must be disposed of, if possible, by reference to the original accounts.

In the summer of 1862, excavations had been taking place in all three mounds north of the road, and quantities of cremation pottery, mostly sherds, had been found in the mounds. Mr. Francis Francis's account in the *Field* goes on:—(the italics are mine) 'The remains being found all over the mounds, and at all levels, Mr. Davidson was induced to try lower yet, and go completely under *one of the mounds* and into the virgin, and as was supposed, undisturbed soil. Accordingly they trenched down deeply below *one of the mounds*: the soil here *lost all appearance of the, black burnt strata* or the peaty colour and consisted of a *pure bright-yellow or golden sand*. *While digging in this* they came upon the remains of some woodwork. The wood was of course perfectly decayed though retaining its form and fibre. *Carrying the excavation further, the woodwork seemed to form a flooring of some kind*. Proceeding with the greatest care and caution they came upon a few fragments of glass, and close by it, a mass of human hair, about the covering for one head. It was a dark dirty red. This hair, or the head upon which it formerly grew, (but of which no trace had been found) had been wrapped in a cloth of some kind, for though the fabric had been entirely destroyed by decay, its texture and the warp and woof could be distinctly seen; about four feet from it was found another, but smaller mass of hair. No bones or traces of bones, as far as I could discover, were found . . .'

'The fragments of glass were all carefully collected, and, upon examination, proved to be the remains of a small vase of some kind; and while throwing out the sand a magnificent antique gold ring slipped out of the sand, and was pounced upon by my friend C'.

'The body of the vase itself was of corrugated glass, while the glass itself was of the commonest known, being similar to our pale green bottle-glass. These things, the hair, and vase and the ring, with a small fragment or two said to be of jasper, lay apparently in the middle of the woodwork, which appeared so far to be the

<sup>7</sup> B. Nerman, 'Sutton Hoo—en svensk kunga- eller hövdinggrav?' *Fornvännen*, heft 2-3, 1948, p. 89 and note 29. He speaks of 'a rather uncertain boat-grave' and in the footnote adds 'men det kan, bl. a. på grund av fyndets egendomliga sammansättning och föremålens läge i båten, knappast anses säkert att föremålen verkligen hört till båten.' ('but because, amongst other things, of the peculiar circumstances of the find and the position of the objects in the boat, it can hardly be considered certain that they really belonged to it.')

flooring of some wooden sarcophagus. *All around at equal distances lay small masses of iron coated with sand and entirely oxidised*’.

The mass of ‘dirty red’ ‘human hair’, ‘wrapped in a cloth of some kind’, is worthy of note. Precisely similar finds occurred in both the Sutton Hoo ship-burial of 1939, and in the Broomfield, Essex, barrow.<sup>8</sup> The Sutton Hoo red hair has been identified by the Wool Industries Research Association as ‘animal fibre, i.e. probably wool, dyed a dark brown’, and it is clear, especially from the fairly well-preserved Broomfield remains, that these finds represent the remains of shaggy cloaks in which long matted tufts of animal hair or fur were inserted into a cloth base, in some cases during the weaving process, in others, after it. A detailed study of these remains of ‘fur coats’ is given by Mrs. G. M. Crowfoot and Miss E. G. Crowfoot in the account of the textiles in the Sutton Hoo ship-burial which they have written for the British Museum’s definitive publication of that discovery, now in preparation.

Francis Francis had been helping with the excavations for some time, but happened to be away when the boat was discovered. His main account of it was written from verbal reports of his friend ‘Mr. C.’ who has been referred to already as ‘pouncing upon the gold ring’, and who was a principal in its excavation. The day after the excavation ‘Mr. C.’ wrote a letter to Francis Francis giving further particulars, and this is quoted in the *Field* account.

‘We traced the pieces of iron *from one end of the trench to the other, without removing the pieces*; the result was this: I think we have most clearly and satisfactorily established that the pieces of iron were large rivets. On either side of the trench there were *six rows exactly corresponding, having the appearance of so many steps*; in fact they were the ribs of a boat, for the wood between them had all gone to decay. The rivets were all horizontal. Proceeding with our investigations, we came to *the flooring, where the rivets were vertical*, and also to the ends . . . the clear outlines of a vessel were apparent, *in the centre of which it was that we found the ring and the hair and the debris of the glass vase*. The boat was from 46 to 48-ft. long and about 9-ft. 9-ins. or 10-ft. at midships. The woodwork at the bottom, although quite rotten, was sufficiently well-defined to show clearly what it had been’.

Francis Francis adds ‘subsequently the spot was visited by a naval gentleman, who quite confirmed all that remained doubtful as to the woodwork being that of a vessel’. The ring and the glass vessel are illustrated in Plates I-III.

<sup>8</sup> The Broomfield discoveries are described in *Victoria County History, Essex*, vol. 1, pp. 320-5, and in *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries*, xv, pp. 250-5. The pile textiles are not referred to in the printed accounts, but exist in some quantity amongst the materials from the site in the British Museum.

The glass, gold ring and other remains were thus found on the bottom of the boat ('on the wooden flooring') and 'in the centre of the boat'. It is not quite certain whether this latter expression means 'amidships', or 'on the centre-line', or keel-line. Septimus Davidson refers to the finds as having been made 'in the boat, at one end'. His account however is much less detailed on this aspect of the excavation, and much less of a narrative, than those given by Francis Francis. The precise location of the finds need not be of any great significance, for the burial had been robbed and so disturbed; and in the comparable and contemporary Swedish boat-graves, where the deposit is not concentrated into a central chamber as was the case in the Sutton Hoo ship-burial, the grave-goods are spread out over a longer length of boat. The general context of the surviving grave-goods, and the fact that they were found in the boat, is perfectly clear. They were found '*on the wooden flooring*', and '*all around at equal distances lay small masses of iron*', i.e. the boat-rivets. It may further be noted that the excavators were working in '*bright yellow sand*', well below the level of the cremations and the black and sticky soil associated with them. In other words, their finds were insulated from the layers containing cremation material and they were not mixed up with the remains of other burials. The fact that they did not come from a cremation is in any case clear from their condition. As the illustrations show, the glass and the gold ring had never been through a fire, however imperfectly, and the presence of hair and of cloth vestiges again shows that the grave-goods had not been burnt. Since the boat had not been burnt either, then presumably, being under a barrow and in the middle of a grave-field, it must represent a boat-inhumation and one would naturally assume that the remains of unburnt grave-goods found on its floor belonged to it. No other inhumations at all were encountered in the course of extensive trenching in the surroundings by the excavators. Thus it cannot be doubted that the finds belong to the boat and date the boat-burial.

The excavations were naturally carried out in a manner which leaves something to be desired by present day standards, and parts of Francis Francis's racy and entertaining account now seem rather hair-raising. 'We came on an urn', he writes, 'and crush went the spade through a portion of it, fracturing the rim seriously'. His account of the method used to excavate a barrow shows that, as one might expect, neither the significance of the physical relationship of the various remains to each other in the ground, nor their stratigraphy, was realised.

'We worked from the centre towards the outside', he writes, 'conducting the digging with the greatest caution, and rather under-digging and mining so as to let the upper mass of the earth, in which the remains might be supposed to lie, to fall in'. Nevertheless,

it is quite clear that the work was carried out by careful and intelligent men in a scientific spirit. In view of the earlier history of excavations and rifling, they began their 'investigations' 'with little expectation of gathering any results'.<sup>9</sup> They were as interested in the boat as in the conventional 'finds' and the accounts abound with interesting and intelligent observations, some of a stratigraphical nature, which illuminate the structure of the mounds and the character of the site as a whole. In particular we may be thankful for the excavation and record of the boat, a considerable task, which might so easily have been bungled by digging out the rivets as they were seen, or left incomplete and in a state of uncertainty. The work was carried out with great care, the excavators 'scraping and sweeping with the hands only between the rows of rivets'. We may be thankful also for the trouble taken by the excavators to collect almost every fragment of the shattered claw-beaker.

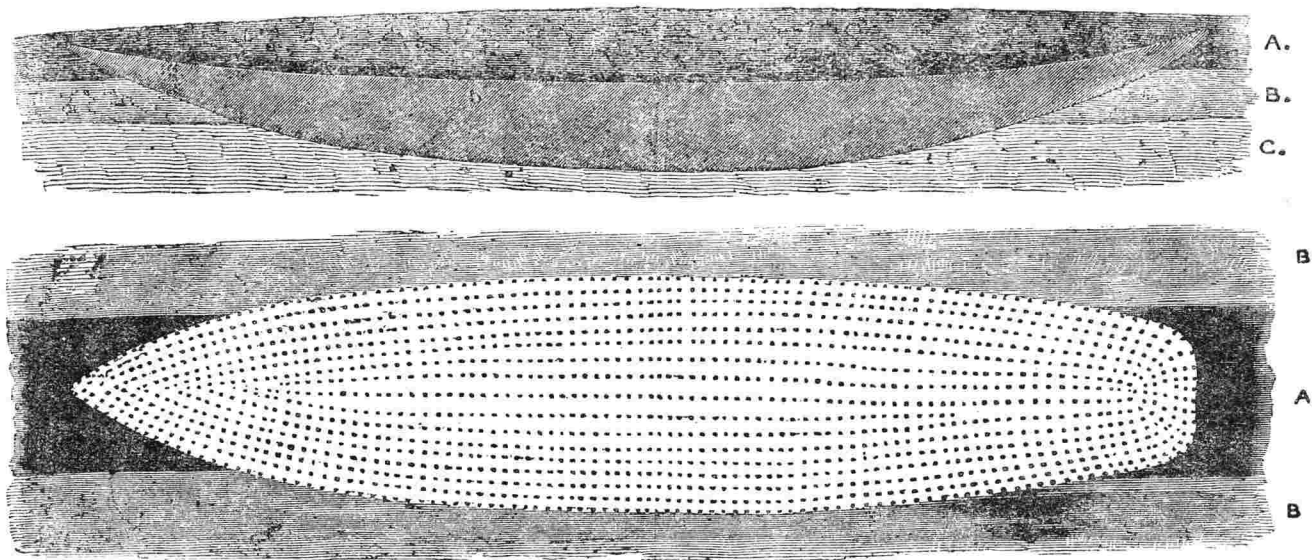
The original accounts also allow us to clear up a point with regard to the boat. In discussing it (*Antiquaries Journal*, xx, 1940, p. 191) Mr. C. W. Phillips refers to accounts which say that it had only six strakes a side; though he pointed out that if this were so the plan of the clench nails in the original publication (Figs. 3 and 4) must be incorrect. 'Mr. C.'s' letter, however, speaks of six strakes on either side of the trench, in which the rivets were all horizontal, and in between a floor in which the rivets were vertical. Since the sides of the boat were roughly vertical (rivets horizontal); or 'at an obtuse angle from the floor upwards', as Septimus Davidson has it (Fig. 4) and the gunwales were 9-ft. 9-ins. or 10-ft. apart amidships, the floor (i.e. the flattening or flattened bottom of the settled boat) must have been of appreciable width—certainly more than one plank (the keel plank)—and this implies an additional two or three strakes a side for the boat.

The contemporary plan and section, not professionally surveyed but probably accurate in general,<sup>10</sup> shows an odd number of alignments of rivets (17). The Sutton Hoo ship of 1939 had an even number (18). The region of the keel of the Sutton Hoo ship and the nature of its keel plank have not as yet been elucidated and may never be; and it is at present only safe to say that it probably had nine strakes a side. With 18 rivet alignments, this would allow for a narrow keel plank coming between the 9th and 10th alignments, these being the alignments that would fix the bottom strake on either side to the keel plank. The plan and section of the Snape boat, however, both show an odd number of alignments, 17, and

<sup>9</sup> cf. Septimus Davidson, *loc. cit.*, p. 177.

<sup>10</sup> 'The plan, not having been made by a professional surveyor, may not be minutely accurate, especially as to the exact position of the rivets at the smaller end'—Septimus Davidson, *loc. cit.*, p. 181.





Longitudinal Section and Plan of the Boat found at Snape.—Scale 1-in. to 8-ft.  
A. Black and White Sand.      B. Reddish Sand.      C. Yellow Sand.

FIG. 3.—The Snape boat. Taken from Dr. Hele's *Notes about Aldeburgh*.

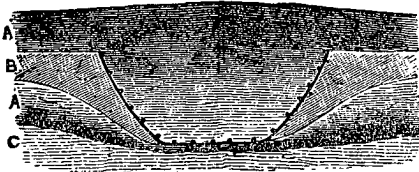
since the halves of the boat must balance, this could only mean, if correct, that the boat had a broad keel plank, riveted for some reason down the centre, and eight strakes a side. The other possibility is that there were in fact 18 alignments in the Snape boat, not 17, and that its construction was the same in this respect as that of the Sutton Hoo ship.

Septimus Davidson himself, in the account as given in *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries*, 2 Series, vol. II, p. 177, *et seq.*, says that the rows were six in number on either side and four or five in the bottom of the boat. All in all, we may conclude that the boat did not have six strakes a side, including the gunwale strake, but either eight or nine. It cannot now be shown how many strakes the small boat found at Sutton Hoo in 1938 had.

While we are discussing the boat it may be noted that its peculiar feature, the blunt stern, as shown in the plan, is not referred to in the accounts. Two other observations by Septimus Davidson may also be noted. 'In each row of rivets, seven were included within a distance of 3-ft.' and (whatever it may mean) 'All the rows terminated in two bolts lying parallel with each other, one at the stem, the other at the stern'.

In spite of the lack of any express statement on the point and the confusing accounts of the work, it is possible to deduce under which of the mounds the boat-grave was found. It lay under the westernmost and largest of the three on the north side of the road. There are various reasons for thinking this. First, there is nothing to indicate that it was under the smallest, easternmost mound, whose excavation is dismissed in a few sentences by Francis Francis, and not even mentioned by the others. Secondly, it can hardly have been under the central mound, 60-70-ft. across, and 4-ft. 6-ins. high, which was the first to be opened. In this mound 'a wide and deep central excavation extending to a depth of several feet below the base of the mound' had already been made, in which 'nothing was found', and 'it was obvious that the natural soil had not been disturbed'. The observant Dr. Hele, who was present, says that the excavations were 'carried down to a depth of about 10-ft.' and that we then stopped, 'being satisfied the soil we were then working had never before been disturbed, being red and yellow sand'. The depth of the boat was 4-ft. as excavated, and its bottom is shown on the sections (Figs. 3 and 4), which are drawn to scale, as 6-ft. below the crest of the mound. It can thus hardly have been in a mound which had already been excavated to a depth of 10-ft. or thereabouts, and into the natural. It is clear that the Bronze Age urn, the urn with batches of vertical grooves and swastikas, and at least one other Saxon urn, and the two iron spearheads, which were found near the Bronze Age urn, all came

from the westernmost mound; and Septimus Davidson's account speaks of the deepening of the excavations, which resulted in the discovery of the boat, as following directly upon these discoveries. Again, the western mound, (like the central one) had a broad cutting right through it from margin to margin. As a large slice of this mound on the south side had been cut off by the road, we can assume that this margin-to-margin cutting ran east and west, parallel with the road. This would also be the natural way to site a cutting, so that the spoil could be carried out freely from either end without encroaching on the highway. Such a long trench would be a necessary preliminary to the exposure of a 48-ft. boat throughout its length. Dr. Hele tells us that the boat lay east and west. There is therefore for all these reasons no occasion to doubt that the boat was under the western-most of the three mounds.



Transverse section of boat. Scale, 1 inch to 8 feet.

AA. Black and white sand.  
B. Reddish sand. C. Yellow sand.

Fig. 4.—Section across the Snape boat. Taken from Dr. Hele's *Notes about Aldeburgh*.

The dimensions of this mound are given by Septimus Davidson at 72-ft. in diameter and 4-ft. 6-ins. in height. This is somewhat bigger than mounds 4, 6, 8, 9 and 11 at Sutton Hoo, but smaller than 3, 5, 7, 10 and of course than No. 1, the ship-barrow.<sup>11</sup>

Of the finds mentioned in these accounts, the 'red hair', 'coarse sail-cloth', 'jasper fragments', and the two spear-heads said to have been found in one of the mounds are now missing. A considerable number of heavily-rusted iron boat-rivets, the fragments of the glass beaker, and a good deal of cremation pottery comprising nine or ten complete or restored urns, some being from the 1863 excavations, and fragments of numbers of others, are now in the Ipswich Museum.

Nothing was known, when the present re-scrutiny of the Snape discoveries was in progress, of the whereabouts of the ring. It was not among the Snape items given to the Aldeburgh Museum. It was a piece of considerable interest. Classical intaglios like that with which the Snape ring was set are otherwise unknown in pagan-Saxon archaeology. Three classical cameos, however, and a plaque

<sup>11</sup> *Antiquaries Journal*, xx, 1940, p. 152.

with a figural scene in late antique style, occurred in the West Mound at Old Uppsala in Uppland, Sweden.<sup>12</sup> When we remember that part of a plaque with the classical figure of a Winged Victory was found in the 1938 boat-grave at Sutton Hoo, there is a suggestion here that we have another curious parallel between the archæologies of Suffolk and Uppland. In any case, the ring was obviously a fine piece, to judge by the engraving published by Septimus Davidson; and the details of its filigree work seemed to offer the best evidence for allotting a fairly precise date to the burial.

Another point of interest had recently made the ring a subject of international discussion. One of many reasons for supposing the Sutton Hoo ship-burial of 1939 to have been a cenotaph is the absence of any intimately personal objects from the burial deposit, and the absence of a finger-ring had been given as an example.<sup>13</sup> Professor Nerman however claimed that this had no bearing on the presence or absence of a body at Sutton Hoo, since finger-rings never occurred in any of the related Swedish boat- or other graves in the Vendel period (later 6th to 8th century) in spite of the fact that finger-rings were a distinctive feature of Scandinavian archæology in both the preceding and succeeding periods.<sup>14</sup> To this it was replied that even if finger-rings were conspicuously absent in Vendel-period archæology in Scandinavia, they were quite common in the Anglo-Saxon graves of that time in England, and had in fact occurred in an East Suffolk boat-grave, since the Snape burial had certainly contained a gold ring, which was also a particularly fine specimen.<sup>15</sup> Professor Nerman however was not to be persuaded by this, since, as has been said, he doubted whether the Snape objects were found in the boat, and whether the Snape discoveries represented a boat-grave at all. The Snape ring was thus from many points of view an object of great interest, and since a piece of such obvious and intrinsic value was unlikely to have been lost, the writer made strenuous efforts to trace it. Letters were written to the Ipswich Museum, the Aldeburgh authorities, the Vicar of the parish, and other local residents, and clues provided were followed up, but the descendants of the excavators could not be traced and the search had reached a dead end, when the following letter addressed to the Secretary of the British Museum, and dated 24th November, 1950, appeared on the writer's desk:—

<sup>12</sup> Sune Lindquist, *Uppsala Höggar och Ottarshögen*, Stockholm, 1936, p. 184, Figs. 106, 107 and 185.

<sup>13</sup> *Antiquaries Journal*, xx, 1940, p. 176: *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial—A Provisional Guide*, British Museum, 1947, p. 32.

<sup>14</sup> 'Sutton Hoo—en svensk kunga- eller hövdinggrav?' *Fornvännen*, h. 2-3 1948, pp. 84-7.

<sup>15</sup> *Archæological News Letter*, vol. II, no. 10. March, 1950, pp. 166-9.

21 Addison Gardens,  
W. 14.

Dear Sir,

My father, the late Hugh Morgan Davidson, had in his possession an antique ring found during the opening of a burial mound at Snape in Suffolk. It was always his wish that you should accept this ring for your collections after his death.

An account of the finding of the ring, and I believe a photograph of it, appears in a book of notes on Aldeburgh by Dr. Hele. My grandfather Septimus Davidson was present at the opening of the mound, and was I believe the finder of the ring.

If you would be so kind as to give me an appointment I shall have great pleasure in bringing it to you.

Yours faithfully,

(Mrs.) W. M. Christie.

It was pure coincidence. It need hardly be said that an appointment was made with alacrity, and that the ring is now in the British Museum (1950, 12-6, 1); so that a detailed publication, with photographs, is now possible. The National Collections are indebted to Mrs. H. M. Davidson, into whose ownership the ring had passed, for the gift, in accordance with her late husband's wish 'I should like this to be presented to the British Museum, as it is in my opinion a National treasure'. No further information however was forthcoming from Septimus Davidson's descendants about the jasper fragments or other missing items.

#### THE FINDS

1. *Large gold ring*, (Plates I and II) weight 14 grammes; diameter of hoop (internal)  $9/10$ ths inch or 2.2 cms.; width of bezel (outside measurement giving maximum width of ring)  $9/10$ ths inch or 2.2 cms. The central raised setting for the gem is surrounded by a beaded gold wire and contains a late antique onyx (nicolo) intaglio, with bevelled edges, bearing on the flat central portion a nude male figure personifying BONVS EVENTVS (a happy outcome) holding two ears of corn in his right hand and a libation bowl, (showing faint horizontal flutings, possibly unintentional) in his left. The hair is done in a roll. The stone is primarily

black, and this is the colour of the bevelled edge. The flat central part, however, in which the figure is carved, is a pale milky blue. The oval gem is set with its long axis at right angles to the hoop, not as is the general rule with classical rings, in the same alignment. This gives the bezel unusual width. The broad shoulders thus provided are richly embellished with filigree scrolls, comprising on each shoulder an elongated 'hook' motive of hook-and-eye type, the 'hook' separating two opposed S-scrolls, which have a single gold granule in each terminal. The filigree scrolls, executed in twisted wire, are set about with granules, most, but not all, of which were surrounded by individual beaded-wire collars. The bezel and both ornamented shoulders are included within another outer beaded-wire border. The 'äquator-schnitt' (a cut across each bead along its maximum diameter) is nowhere present. The hoop of the ring is broad and flat, and carries a milled or barred central moulding flanked on either side by two raised lines. At either end of the hoop, where the shoulders begin to develop and outside the beaded-wire border that encloses the filigree-work, is a transverse line of four collared granules (one missing) giving the impression of rivet-heads. The internal diameter of the ring is unusually large. It must have been worn by a man, either on the thumb or forefinger.

The fields that contain the filigree work on the shoulder of the ring show a matt, unfinished surface, which no doubt made it easier for the solder by which the filigree is affixed to grip. The remaining gold surfaces are smooth and polished. The shoulders, 'dummy rivet-heads' and the bars and beads on the hoop show clear signs of wear, and suggest that the ring had been in use for an appreciable period of time before it was buried.

The ring was previously known from the engraving published by Septimus Davidson, *loc. cit.*, p. 181, and repeated in Hele's *Notes About Aldeburgh*, and by Reginald Smith in the *Victoria County History*.

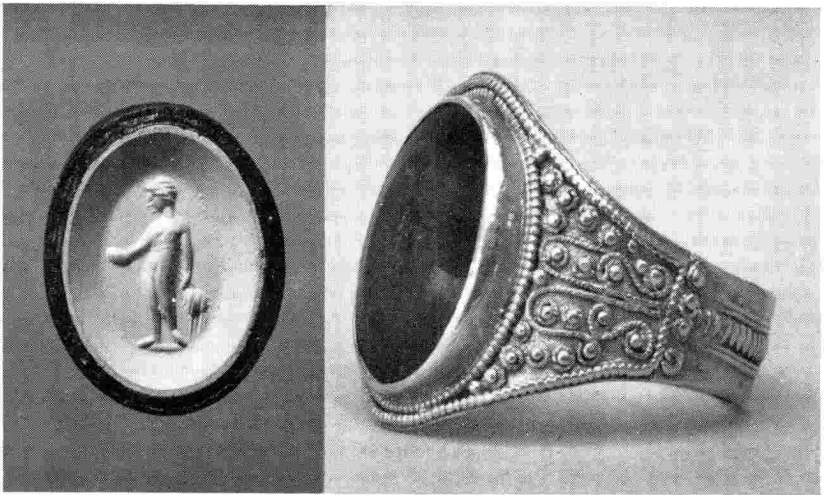
2. *Glass claw-beaker*, in many fragments, including 7 claws and most of the rim, the foot missing (Plate III). Above the claws the wall is practically straight. The rim leans outwards and is slightly thickened at the lip. The metal is bubbly, olive green in colour, rather like that of the Taplow Barrow vases, but duskiere, and with wisps of rich brown pigment conspicuous in the claws. There were eight broad-lobed claws, with lobes and shafts well inflated and hooked out competently *à jour*. The claws are arranged in two tiers. Each claw has a vertical overtrail covering the central hook-channel; six of these are notch-tooled, the seventh is plain. The shafts of the claws in the upper tier are drawn well down the vase between the claws of the lower tier. The claw shown in Plate III

PLATE I.



(By courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum).  
The Snape Ring ( $\frac{2}{3}$ ).

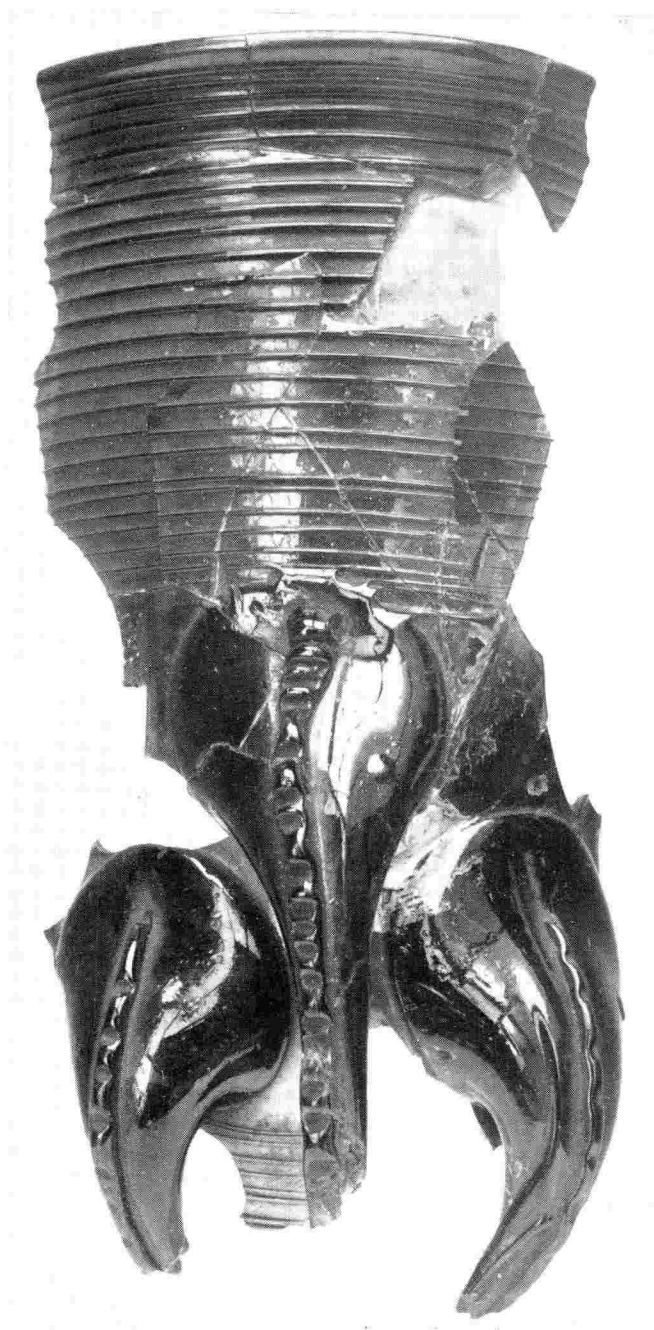
PLATE II.



*(By courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum).*  
The Snape Ring ( $\frac{2}{7}$ ).



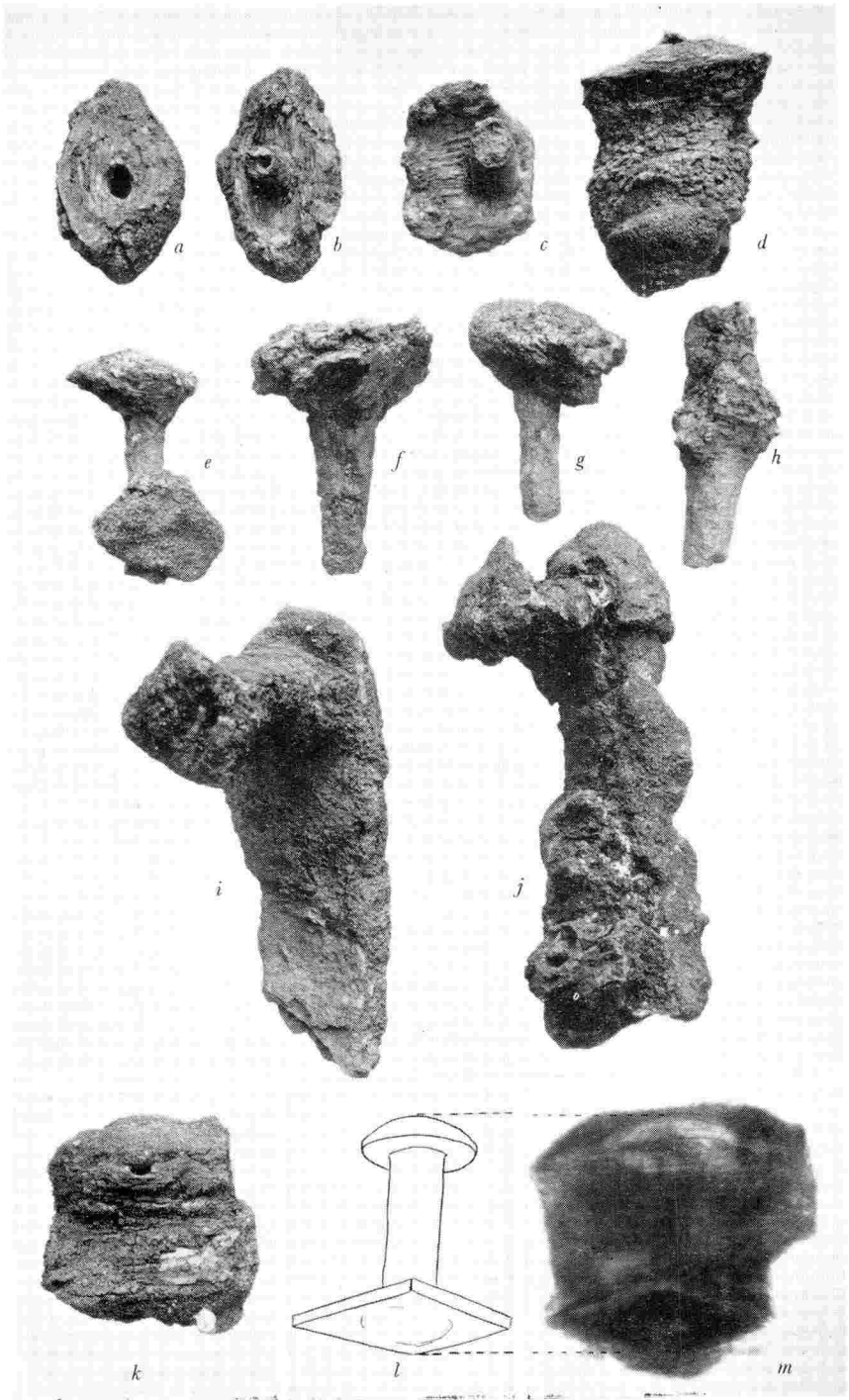
PLATE III.



(Photo. Brit. Mus.).

Fragments of glass claw-beaker from the Snape boat-grave ( $\frac{1}{4}$ )

PLATE IV.



(Photo. Brit. Mus.).

Iron boat-rivets and bolts from the Snape boat-grave. *l* is a sketch based on the X-ray photograph *m*.

had an overall length of at least  $3\frac{1}{2}$  ins. The vase has a distinct waist between the two tiers, the lobes of the lower claws resting on a bulge of the vessel. The upper trail extends to 2.7 ins. below the rim and is of 26 or 27 close-set lines. The lower trail is clear of the lobes of the lower tier and is of fine execution, with thin fully-round lines thickening (as is usual) towards the bottom of the vase. Wall-thickness, 1 mm. or under, is practically uniform except where features (*cf.* claws, rim) develop.

Estimated diameter of mouth: 9 cms. (3.6 ins.).

Estimated height: 18.5 cms. ( $7\frac{1}{4}$  ins.).

3. Numerous *iron boat-rivets* (Plate IV), much corroded, among which the following appear to be represented:—(i) Clench nails, with circular domed heads and diamond-shaped roves, heads and roves *c.* 1.2 ins. apart. (Plate IV *d, k-m*). (ii) Clench nails of the same form, heads and roves *c.* 1.75 ins. apart (represented by Plate IV *f*). (iii) ? Rib-bolts; a 2.5 in length preserved, of something more massive and longer than the clench nails. (Plate IV *h*). (iv) Portions of iron strips, of uncertain original length and purpose, through which iron bolts are fixed. (Plate IV *i, j*). Of three bolts associated with such strips, one shows a length of 1.75 ins., one 1.5 ins. and the third 1 in. between the rove and the inner face of the iron strip.

The iron objects are much corroded and incrustated with sand, and X-ray examination yields no further information, beyond providing a nice illustration of the typical clench nail form with diamond rove and domed circular head. (Plate IV *l, m*).

Some of the rivets illustrated have been subjected to cleaning by mechanical means, *i.e.* picking and scraping, and the shapes and dimensions of the shafts are not necessarily those of the original rivets. The X-ray photograph probably gives a truer impression of the original.

#### FINDS NOT PRESERVED

The following, mentioned in the accounts of the excavation, are not now preserved:—

4. A mass of dingy-red hair, with a smaller mass found 4-ft. away.

5. Coarse 'sail-cloth', 'in which the hair was wrapped'.

6. Some fragments described as jasper.

7. Part of a second glass vessel. In describing the glass that was collected, Francis Francis says: 'One small fragment alone however differed from the rest, and belonged evidently to some other

vessel which was not present'. Later he adds to this description as follows:—'The solitary other piece of glass found amongst the fragments of the glass itself is also a point of consideration as it differs entirely from all the other fragments, being more of an opaque blue, and being a thicker glass and of better manufacture, more in fact like a fragment of Roman glass'. (*The Field*, January 24th, 1863, p. 75).

8. Two iron spear-heads, found near the Bronze Age urn, i.e. over the boat-grave in the westernmost mound. One spear-head remained attached to a portion of its wooden shaft. These spears were no doubt derived from the primary inhumation, i.e. from the boat-grave.

Nos. 4 and 5 may be treated as a unity as discussed on page 6 above.

#### ARCHÆOLOGICAL COMMENT AND THE DATE OF THE BOAT GRAVE

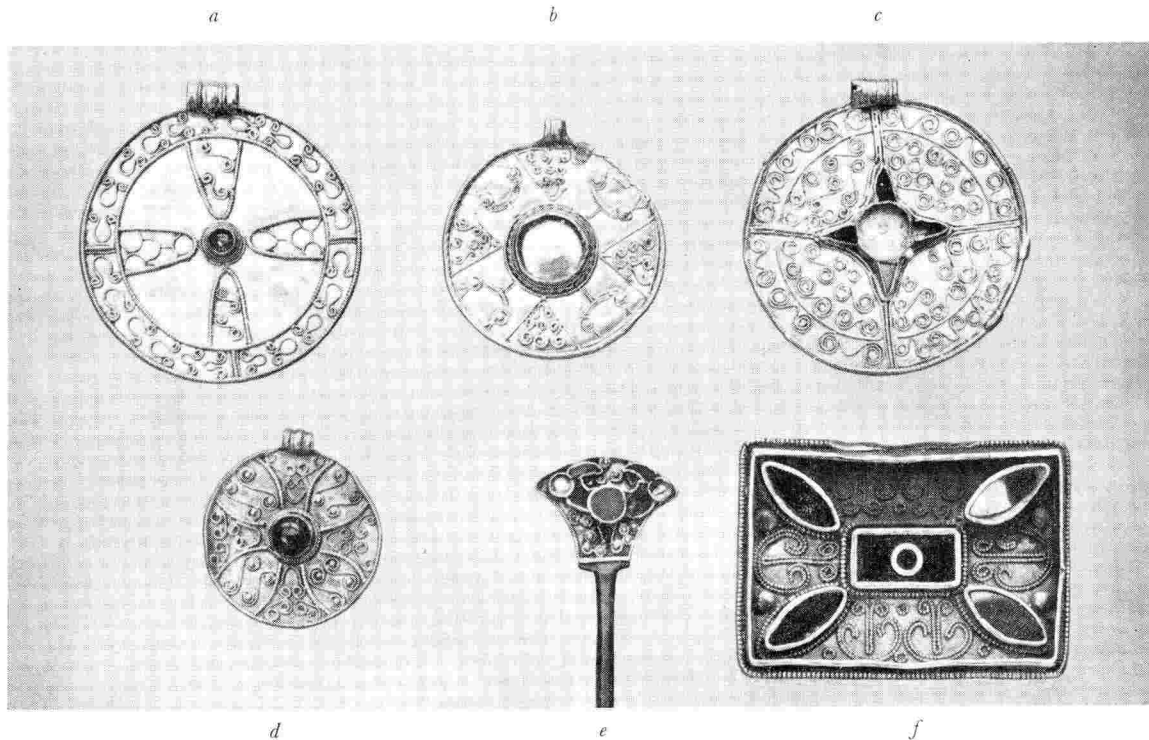
The Snape ring is undoubtedly the finest finger-ring of the pagan Saxon period yet found, and is of the highest quality. The nicolo intaglio almost certainly came from a Romano-British finger-ring. Such onyx (nicolo) intaglios, in which the design, usually a single figure, is cut in the bluish-white layer on the darker background, were very common in Roman Britain,<sup>16</sup> and the style of engraving of the Snape intaglio agrees closely with that of numerous Romano-British nicolo-intaglio finger-rings in the British Museum collections. The gold ring and setting is Anglo-Saxon work of the 7th century and was evidently built and designed to take this particular intaglio gem. Two features of the gold ring are distinctive from the point of view of date; the 'hook-and-eye' filigree motive, and the granulation. The S-scrolls, which occur in Romano-British gold work, for example on the New Grange ring,<sup>17</sup> are common in Anglo-Saxon gold jewellery of the late 6th and 7th century. The hook-and-eye motive however is extremely rare. The only British occurrences known to me are on the two gold clips fitted to the hilt of the Sutton Hoo sword (Plate VI *a, b*);<sup>18</sup> on each of the three gold bracteates found together at Milton Regis near Sittingbourne, Kent, in 1915 or 1916 and now in the British Museum (Plate V *a-c*); and on an unusual gold ornament of uncertain date from Faversham, Kent, also in the British Museum (Plate V *f*). The bracteate-pendants were found with six silver *sceatta* coins and can hardly have been deposited much before

<sup>16</sup> cf. *Antiquities of Roman Britain*, British Museum, 1951, Fig. 13, 1, 2, 3 and 5.

<sup>17</sup> T. D. Kendrick, *Anglo-Saxon Art*, Plate XXXII, 4.

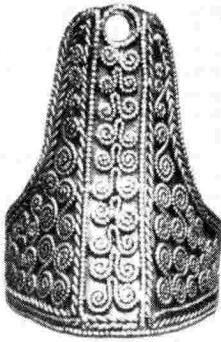
<sup>18</sup> *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, xxv (1952) Plate XI.

PLATE V.

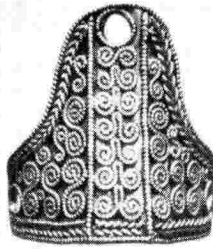


(By courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum).

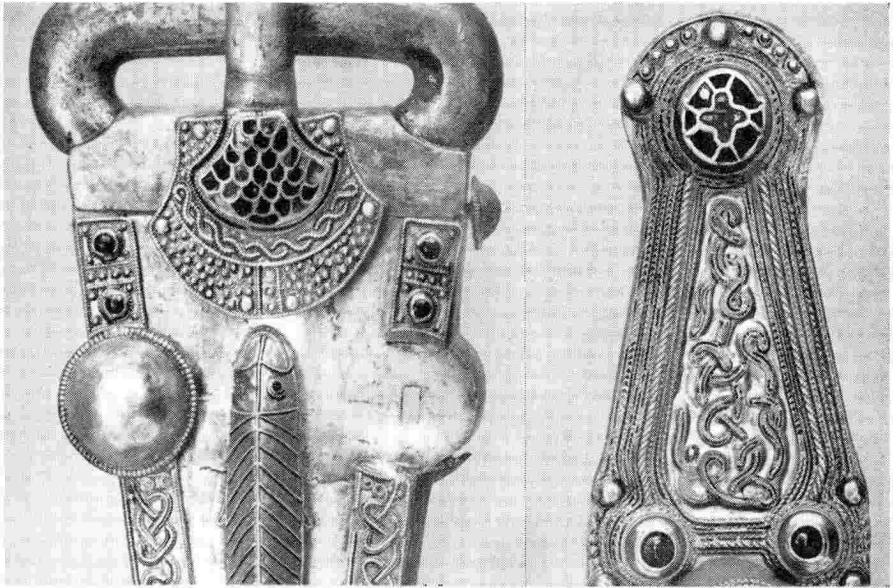
- a-c.* Gold bracteates from Milton Regis, Kent.  
*d.* Pendant of pale gold from Breach Down, Kent.  
*e.* Silver and gold pin from Wingham, Kent.  
*f.* Gold ornament from Faversham, Kent. (All †).



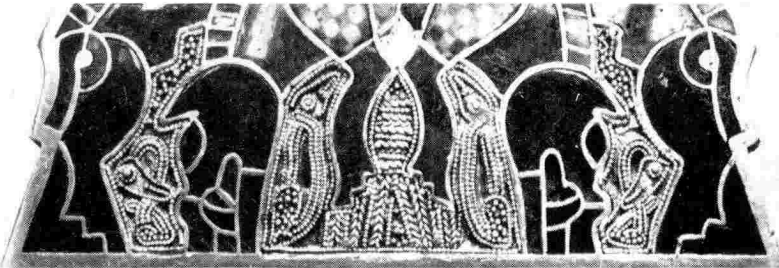
*a*



*b*



*d*



*e*

(By courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum).

*a, b.* Gold clips with filigree decoration from the Sutton Hoo ship-burial sword grip (?).  
*c.* Detail of silver and gold buckle, Crundale Down, Kent. *d.* Detail of gold buckle, Taplow Barrow, Bucks. *e.* Detail from one of a pair of gold shoulder-clasps, Sutton Hoo ship-burial.  
 (*c, d*, slightly under actual size; *e*, enlarged).

c. 675 A.D. the generally accepted date for the emergence of the silver *sceatta* currency. One of the three (Plate V *b*) has an unusual design; and on it gold granules appear as eyes for small filigree zoomorphic heads. In some ways, in particular the use of collared granules and the open rather bitty filigree, the closest parallel to this piece is a rather similar bracteate no doubt of English origin in the heterogeneous treasure found at Hon in Norway<sup>19</sup> deposited in the 9th century; and on the whole the general complexion of these pendants is very late in the pagan period. The closest parallels however in exact style of hook-and-eye device to the Snape ring are the Sutton Hoo sword-clips and the Faversham ornament. The two little gold fittings of the sword-grip are of different sizes, and made to fit the top and bottom of the grip, on the same side of the handle. It seems clear that they were made for the Sutton Hoo sword, not transferred from some other weapon, and they should be no older than the sword itself, the sword having been buried with the other treasures, c. 650-660 A.D.

The other distinctive feature of the filigree-work that helps us to date the ring is the use of granulation. The closest parallels to the granulation on the Snape ring are the late pendant of pale gold from Breach Down, Kent (Plate V *d*)<sup>20</sup> with celtic cross design; the ornamental pin from Wingham, Kent (Plate V *e*)<sup>21</sup> which has a bird's head design in cloisonné garnets, with cabochon garnets for eyes; and the remarkable and highly distinctive buckle of silver and pale gold from Crundale Down, Kent (Plate VI *c*), all in the British Museum.<sup>22</sup> While granulation may be of early occurrence in Scandinavia, as on the Norwegian scabbard-mounts especially those from Egge, Opland and Etne, Hordaland,<sup>23</sup> and still earlier on one of the great gold collars and other objects of the Migration period,<sup>24</sup> it is in general a later development in West and North Europe, and is characteristic of the 8th century and of the Carolingian, Ottonian and Viking periods.<sup>25</sup> In Anglo-Saxon archæology pieces such as the 8th or 9th century rings from Meux Abbey, Garrick Street, London, and Stockbridge, Hampshire

<sup>19</sup> Sigurd Grieg, 'Vikingetidens Skattefund', *Universitetets Oldsaksamlings Skrifter*, Bind II, Oslo 1929, pp. 182-98; Fig. 22, p. 189.

<sup>20</sup> N. Åberg, *Anglo-Saxons in England*, Uppsala, 1926, Fig. 240.

<sup>21</sup> Åberg, *op. cit.*, Fig. 267; R. F. Jessup, *Anglo-Saxon Jewellery*, 1950, Plate IX and p. 102, No. 7; B.M. *Guide to Anglo-Saxon Antiquities*, 1923, Fig. 63.

<sup>22</sup> Åberg, *op. cit.*, Fig. 222; Baldwin Brown, *The Arts in Early England*, III, Pt. 73: I.

<sup>23</sup> Bjørn Hougen, *The Migration Style in Norway*, Oslo 1936, Nos. 62, 64.

<sup>24</sup> cf. Salin, *Altgermanische Thierornamentik*, 212-3, esp. Fig. 499, *e, f, g*; *Tiotusen År i Sverige*, Statens Historiska Museum, Stockholm, 1945, Figs. 175-6, and 177, top left.

<sup>25</sup> cf. Holger Arbman, *Schweden und das Karolingische Reich*, Plates 54-64; and numerous examples in the 9th century Hon find referred to above (Footnote 19).

(Ehlla's ring);<sup>26</sup> or the Kirkoswald trefoil brooch<sup>27</sup> and the Alfred Jewel in the 9th century, and the openwork border of the 10th century cloisonné enamel Dowgate Hill brooch<sup>28</sup> may be quoted as instances of the use and development of granulation in later Saxon times. The fashion may be seen beginning in a small way on quite a number of well-known pieces in the earlier part of the 7th century; for example, the eyes of the birds' heads in filigree on the back of the Kingston brooch<sup>29</sup> and on a remarkable little gold buckle from Faversham in Kent,<sup>30</sup> are individual gold balls in collars; and small individual gold pellets each in a wire annulet are set in and between the heart-shaped filigree scrolls in the outer-zone of decoration of the gold pendant from Faversham, Kent, which has three birds' heads in triquetra arrangement in cloisonné step-pattern garnet work.<sup>31</sup> A line of collared granules appears round the toe of the belt-buckle in the Taplow Barrow (Plate VI *d*).<sup>32</sup> The Snape ring, Wingham pin-head, Breach Down pendant and Crundale buckle, however, all show granulation liberally used and well-established. The Breach Down pendant, on which individual granules are set in the terminals of the filigree S-scrolls as on the Snape ring, and the Wingham pin-head, where, as on the Snape ring, some of the granules set about in the field are with collars and some (deliberately) without, are the closest parallels. The Crundale buckle, with its



Fig. 5.—Unfinished sketch (3) for an animal in 'Book of Durrow style', from the back of the Crundale Down buckle (Plate VI *c*).

running knot interlace in the borders terminating in snake's-heads seen from above; its unique cloisonné scale-pattern on the tongue-shield, reminiscent of the birds' wings of the Lindisfarne Gospels; its Book of Durrow style animal sketch on the back plate (Fig. 5),<sup>33</sup>

<sup>26</sup> These three rings are all illustrated in R. F. Jessup, *op. cit.*, Plate XXXVI (Nos. 7, 8 and 10).

<sup>27</sup> Kendrick, *op. cit.*, Plate LXXVIII, 3; B.M. *Guide to Anglo-Saxon Antiquities*, Fig. 122.

<sup>28</sup> Jessup, *op. cit.*, Pl. XXXII, (1).

<sup>29</sup> Kendrick, *op. cit.*, Pl. XXXI, 6.

<sup>30</sup> B.M. *Guide*, Pl. I, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Åberg, Fig. 243; B.M. *Guide*, Plate I, 4.

<sup>32</sup> Åberg, Fig. 220; B.M. *Guide*, Plate V, 2; Kendrick, *Anglo-Saxon Art*, Pl. XXXIV, 5. I cannot agree with Sir Thomas Kendrick's early dating (beginning of the 6th century) of the Taplow Barrow, which I would be inclined to attribute to the period 625-630 A.D., in general agreement with long-standing orthodox opinion.

<sup>33</sup> IPEK, ix, 1934, Tf. 28, 12.



and its developed use of granulation, can hardly be much earlier than 640 A.D.; and, finally, granulation is used on one of the Sutton Hoo shoulder-clasps, in the fields between the legs of the intersecting boars at either end of the clasp (Plate VI *e*). The clasps, though not in mint condition, give the impression of being almost the latest pieces of cloisonné jewellery in that dated find. One may suppose them to have been made about 640 A.D. In view of these various parallels, I find it difficult to assign the manufacture of the Snape ring, with its combination of hook-and-eye filigree, granulation with and without collars, and S-scrolls with a granule in each terminal, to a date any earlier than 625 A.D. or its burial to any date much before 630-635 A.D., allowing for the signs of wear on the ring which show that it must have been worn for some little while before burial. The evidence is admittedly slight, but on purely archæological grounds, and assisted by the undoubted lateness of so rich a local boat-grave as the Sutton Hoo ship burial (after 650 A.D.), the Snape boat-grave can, I suggest, be safely placed in the second quarter of the 7th century, and probably falls within the period 635-650.

The claw-beaker cannot be dated with anything approaching the assurance of the ring. One can only say that it belongs to the middle phase of claw-beaker evolution. In the spacing and dovetailing of the claws, with the shafts of the upper tier drawn well down between the claws of the lower tier, in the concentration of the clawlobes into a narrow zone at the middle of the vase; in the rim form, the character and extent of the two horizontal trails, the shape of the claws and the character of their notch-tooled overtrails, especially the narrow, lightly nicked rods on the lower claws; and even in the general colouring of the metal, though greener than most, the vase belongs quite clearly with the vases of the Newport Pagnall, Howletts, Fairford and Westbere group.<sup>34</sup> The Westbere vase is particularly close. Yet the Snape beaker, with its waisting and greater height, its fullness of claw and general fine quality, also shows affinities with the vessels of the Reculver type;<sup>35</sup> and in its tendency for the elongation of the claws, seen in those of the upper tier, which attain a length of at least 3½-ins., suggests a movement towards the tall Taplow-type beakers with prolonged claws, of the 7th century.<sup>36</sup> On the whole it may be attributed to the latter part of the 6th century.

The solitary small fragment of thick blue glass is of great interest. It almost certainly represents a squat bowl of the small Cuddesdon-Broomfield group, an example of which was found in the small boat-grave at Sutton Hoo in 1938.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> W. A. Thorpe, *English Glass*, 1935, Plates X (c), XI (a). <sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, Plate XI (c).

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, Plate XIII (c).

<sup>37</sup> Baldwin Brown, *Arts*, Vol IV, PI. CXXXVI, 2.

## GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Various points of interest emerge from the foregoing study and from the original accounts. First, the ring and the claw-beaker, and the other remains, undoubtedly belong to the buried boat, and the whole represents a robbed boat-grave which may be attributed to the period *c.* 635-650 A.D. There is no reason whatever to suppose otherwise, especially since we now know that boat-graves do occur in this part of Suffolk at this date. A boat of Saxon character under a barrow in the middle of an Anglo-Saxon cremation cemetery can hardly represent anything other than an Anglo-Saxon boat-grave, especially when unburnt grave-goods of the period, remaining from the robbery of the mound, are found on the bottom of the boat.

Secondly, the 50-ft. boat (if one may make some small addition to the recorded length for the stem and stern posts) was man-handled to the site over half a mile at least of gradient. Why was all this trouble taken? Why was one of the convenient forward bluffs or spurs nearer the water or overlooking the estuary not chosen, but instead the boat pulled well inland and quite out of sight of the water? The answer is clear; so that it might be buried in the pre-existing grave-field, and near the settlement this served. There must have been a well-established settlement nearby, and it was probably near the present church.

Furthermore, the trouble taken suggests that boat-burial must have been a custom of real significance in the life of the community, and well-established. The probability is therefore that other boats are buried there, presumably under others of the mounds.

One would only expect in an English boat-grave cemetery of the period, however, few, perhaps very few, boat-graves. The rite is always exceptional; but while in Swedish boat-grave fields it continues without interruption through the pagan Viking period, in England, and more particularly in Suffolk, it must have died out along with pagan burial in general by *c.* 650 A.D. or at the very latest *c.* 675 A.D., with the permanent and general establishment of Christianity.

We may safely say that the Snape boat-grave does not represent a temporary settlement of (? Swedish) raiders or the temporary occupation of a riverine or coastal foothold. It is the act of an established community, as the organised effort of dragging up the boat to a site a mile inland and wholly invisible from the main estuary, but marked by the pre-existence of a sizeable urn field, shows. They were a settled group, boasting a certain wealth and distinction at the top, to whom boat-inhumation of their leading figure meant much. The proximity of their burial-ground to the medieval church and village of Snape suggests that the community

lived on in the same place and has flourished ever since.

It is unwise to apply Swedish analogies too rigidly to the very different milieu of East Anglia.<sup>38</sup> If Snape were a boat-grave cemetery in Sweden its boat-graves (we have suggested that there may be several) would represent the special treatment by inhumation in a boat of the successive male heads of the dominant family, in a community in which all other dead were cremated.<sup>39</sup> At first sight the Snape cemetery appears to run true to this pattern, for only cremations have been found there, apart from the boat-grave. But is the Snape boat-inhumation and urn field a true parallel to the Swedish practice, or does the boat-inhumation, as an inhumation, merely indicate that the community as a whole was abandoning cremation? Are any of the cremations round the boat contemporary with, or later than it? Or do they belong to a distinct and earlier period in the settlement's history?

We must remember that in England, unlike Scandinavia, a 'flight from cremation' (less fashionable now than it used to be)<sup>40</sup> had been in steady progress from the time of the invasions.<sup>41</sup> In East Anglia and other 'strongholds' cremation certainly persisted in some localities into the 7th century, and even to the eve of conversion, that is, overlapping with Christian burial elsewhere. But this is exceptional. At Lackford in the north-west of Suffolk, a Lark valley site that really belongs to the Cambridge fens, there is good evidence that cremations took place in the 7th century, but only very exceptionally does evidence suggest a really late cremation, that might be after say 630 A.D. The only reason for supposing that cremation persisted without dilution at Lackford until the conversion (c. 650) is that no trace whatsoever of the inhumation rite has been found in excavations and agricultural activity that all told must have yielded remains of some 600 urns. If the unexcavated portions<sup>42</sup> adjacent to the main excavated areas run to form, one might consider this true of an area containing over 1000 urns. Yet this by no means exhausts the site; and it is not impossible that a large community abandoning cremation with some rapidity might utilize free ground on the fringes of the great urnfield for this fresh start. There may be inhumations still to be discovered at Lackford, and the same is true of Snape.

<sup>38</sup> See R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford, 'Sutton Hoo, Recent Theories', *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, xxv (1952), pp. 22-3; also some salutary remarks by T. C. Lethbridge, *A Cemetery at Lackford, Suffolk*, 1951, p. 11, first paragraph.

<sup>39</sup> *cf.*, *Vendel i fynd och forskning*, Uppsala, 1938, 79, 80—speculations subsequently confirmed in the excavation of the cemetery at Valsgårde.

<sup>40</sup> Lethbridge, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> *cf.* Collingwood and Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, pp. 448-9; See also Bruce-Mitford, *loc. cit.*, p. 23, footnote 79.

<sup>42</sup> Lethbridge, *op. cit.*, Plan II (p. 2).

We must also reflect that South-East Suffolk is not an area in which cremations might be expected to persist to any unusual degree. It is the part of Suffolk most open to civilizing and southern influences and most sensitive to the influence and example of a Christian royal house,<sup>43</sup> and the mixed cemetery at Ipswich, the Coptic bowl from Wickham Market, near Rendlesham, and other finds, show that cremation had given ground here well before the end of the pagan period.

Can it be that Snape is an exception and that here boat-inhumation and cremation are contemporaneously practised by the same community?

It is not at all easy to obtain from the first-hand accounts (Septimus Davidson, Francis Francis and Hele) a clear picture of the archæological facts at Snape; and it is not surprising that Reginald Smith's summary in the *Victoria County History* does not clear up the ambiguities and seems in fact to be misleading in some respects. After studying the accounts with the greatest care I think the circumstances were as follows.

A trench, probably some 60-ft. long, 14-ft. wide and 6 or 7-ft. deep, was dug in the midst of a fairly dense urnfield, and the boat placed in the trench. The funeral deposit having been laid out in the boat, it was either covered across with planks (as in Sweden) or else, if the deposit was concentrated into a central chamber (as in the Sutton Hoo ship), bows and stern on either side of the chamber were filled up flush with the excavated sand. The perimeter of a circular barrow was marked out around the boat, and turves and soil scraped up from the surrounding heath<sup>44</sup> and thrown up into the middle to construct the mound. Sherds of broken urns from the surrounding ground may be expected to have got into the mound at all levels as a result of this process. This scraping caused a general lowering of the ground surface around the barrows and denuded the urns there so that they were later to come to light 'with the removal of the first sod'. The building of the mound, on the contrary, covered those urns that happened to lie within its circumference with a greater depth of soil, the mound being piled up on the original (undenuded) ground surface that concealed them.

The surprise of the excavators in 1863 when they found many urns *between* the barrows and 'in the flat ground *clear of their margins*' shows that they were unaware of the existence of such a thing as an urnfield. They set out to excavate the barrows, and when they found urns supposed them to be part and parcel of the

<sup>43</sup> R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford, 'Saxon Rendlesham', pp. 234-6.

<sup>44</sup> For evidence for this procedure in the construction of the mound of the Sutton Hoo ship-burial see *Antiquaries Journal*, xx, 1940, p. 202.

barrows, not realising that they came from a flat cemetery which underlay the mounds. The situation however may have been still more complex; for not only had all the mounds been dug deeply into at the centre by previous searchers, which presumably added further broken sherds to their upper levels, but it is possible that some intact urns encountered and displaced by the early Saxons in the digging of the boat-trenches or primary pits, or in scraping the adjacent heath, were deliberately re-interred by them in the barrows as these were being built up. It is thus not surprising that the original accounts make somewhat bewildered reading.

Francis Francis's account gives the impression that whole urns full of bones occurred in the mounds like currants in a bun, the remains (but note *remains*, not specifically *urns*) occurring all over the mounds and at all levels, and 'at depths varying from one to three feet' (but no datum given). In instances, he adds, the urns were so placed as to suggest that they had been placed on the ground surface and covered over with soil. It also appears that some urns at least were encountered in the 6-8-ft. wide trench which Septimus Davidson cut through the largest 72-ft. westernmost mound from edge to edge, a cutting which had been 'kept to the level of the natural soil on which the tumulus was raised'. Reginald Smith, after studying these accounts, was clearly left with the idea that the urns were discovered *in*, and not *under*, the mounds, and this is the impression one gets from his summary in the *Victoria County History*.

Dr. Hele however here comes to the rescue. This part of his account is written in the first person and with an assurance evidently based on precise first-hand observation, so that one feels able to accept his version even when it is at variance with the others. It was also written after the other accounts, with which he must have been quite familiar. He quotes Davidson's description of the boat, and uses his blocks, but on other points, writing as an eye-witness, he deliberately amends him, and here I feel his account can be accepted. 'The first urn we encountered', he says, 'was found three or four inches below the surface of the ground; the latter in the immediate vicinity being of a peculiarly unctuous character'—presumably the black sticky layers noted elsewhere under and outside the barrows. The second urn found, (an Anglo-Frisian type of pot with batches of vertical grooves separated by swastikas<sup>45</sup>) was found 'just below the surface, as the former'. One of the urns found (and none of the accounts differentiates between its placing

<sup>45</sup> A pot of similar form and decoration was found at Bifrons in Kent and is in private ownership, being with the early group of grave-goods formerly at Bifrons House. It is at present on loan to the British Museum. On this urn the swastikas and vertical grooves are very faintly incised.

and that of the other urns) was a large collared urn of the Late Bronze Age. This was upside down, a normal position for such Bronze Age burials, and intact, and therefore presumably undisturbed. Hele describes it as being found 'in precisely the same circumstances as the others' (i.e. three or four inches below the surface of the ground) 'but upside down'. But whereas the other accounts disagree as to its contents, Septimus Davidson saying that it was empty, and Francis Francis, who was away that day, saying that it was, he believed, almost empty, Hele, who was a surgeon, and who was present, says specifically 'It contained as in the other examples, human bone, the femur or thighbone and part of the pelvis being perfect'.<sup>46</sup> From Hele's account it thus seems clear that these three urns at least were undisturbed burials in the flat ground immediately beneath the mound. The other urns found within the circumferences of the barrows were probably so also, but some may have been displaced by the burial parties and later placed on the ground surface (perhaps over the top of the boat) and covered over again as the barrow was raised. It is not therefore necessary to regard the six or more whole urns found as secondary burials inserted in the tumuli, as is implied by Reginald Smith's account.

This is a point of some importance, for it also seems clear that the majority of the urns so encountered were in fact found in the western mound, which contained the boat. If this mound was erected as we have suggested *c.* 635-650 A.D., and the urns were intrusive secondary burials, this would be proof of a wholly unexpected persistence of cremation in this corner of Suffolk right into the Christian period. It would have yielded us the picture of boat-burial as a special custom reserved for the leaders of an otherwise cremating community, as in Sweden. And it might have borne directly upon an important and mysterious problem, the one-time presence of a quantity of burnt bone (deduced now from chemical traces only) on the Anastasius dish in the Sutton Hoo ship-burial, in other words on the problem of the Sutton Hoo cenotaph.<sup>47</sup> It would at least have shown us that cremation existed contemporaneously with the Sutton Hoo burial in this area. These are not problems that would have worried Reginald Smith, for he regarded the Snape ring, both gem and setting, as Roman, the vase as early, and the whole burial as belonging to the 6th century, a time when intrusive cremations need cause no particular comment. In fact however we need not hesitate to regard the boat-burial as later than the cremations, possibly appreciably later, since it was dug into the thickest part of the urnfield ('the urns were particularly thick in the region of the boat'). The urns that survive from

<sup>46</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>47</sup> *cf.* Bruce-Mitford, 'Recent Theories', pp. 23, 42.

Snape have not been studied in detail, but inspection suggests that there is nothing abnormal or especially late about them.

The Snape burial-ground naturally invites comparison with that at Sutton Hoo. Like the Swedish boat-graves and also the great royal mounds at Old Uppsala, the Snape tumuli are part of a much larger grave-field containing ordinary burials. At present there is no sign of this at Sutton Hoo. Although sherds of late Neolithic beaker-ware were found in the sand filling the bows and stern of the Sutton Hoo ship, and one of the other mounds produced a segmented faience bead of the Bronze Age, no single sherd of Saxon cremation urns (or any other indications of a more extensive Saxon site in the vicinity of the mounds) has come to light in the process of opening the four mounds already excavated there. The flat ground around the barrows has not yet been trenched, and a flat cemetery may yet come to light. This would be of first-rate importance in revealing the significance and elucidating the background of the great ship-burial, and a matter of more than insular interest. If no such burials are found, then the Sutton Hoo grave-field becomes a thing apart, very possibly a place reserved for the burials of the royal family, while the urnfield found at Rendlesham<sup>48</sup> represents the burial place of the community associated with the royal seat there. Great interest therefore attaches to the excavation of the flat ground around the barrows at Sutton Hoo, as well as to the full exploration of the primary burials in the mounds, and of the mounds themselves, which may well contain important features of a ritual or structural kind.

A few final points may be noted. The boat found was not under the largest barrow of the group. The largest barrow, measured by Francis Francis and given as 85-ft. across and 7 or 8-ft. high, was on the south side of the road. It was not touched in 1862 or 1863, and may have been the one whose site has been lost.

The quality of the ring, and the presence of gold, wholly absent from the contemporary burials of the Vendel and Valsgårde boat-grave cemeteries of Sweden, and also the large size of the boat, suggests that in the Anglo-Saxon milieu our second-class (i.e., as compared with Sutton Hoo, non-royal) boat-graves are likely to be wealthier and more luxuriously furnished than the Swedish ones.

The ring, 'pieces of jasper' and glass vessels amongst the vestiges from the Snape boat are all items absent from the Sutton Hoo ship-burial and tend to emphasise the variety we may expect from these burials.

Lastly, while it is always dangerous to argue from negative

<sup>48</sup> Bruce-Mitford, 'Saxon Rendlesham', pp. 247-9.

evidence, the apparent total absence of bone in the Snape boat, together with the absence of any of the horse trappings, saddle studs and other metal objects associated with animals, again suggests that the burial is not 'pure Swedish', as Professor Nerman considered the Sutton Hoo ship-burial to be, but is a boat-grave at least modified or coloured by its English milieu. Swedish boat-graves are well-furnished with such animal remains and furniture. They are normally laid outside the concentration of grave-goods, in or outside the bows or stern of the boat, and so might be expected to have been missed by the grave robbers who dug in the centres of the mounds. Their absence from the excavators' accounts must thus it seems represent a genuine absence from the original burial.