

To do:

- 1) Get out your
 - Class book/paper you are working on. You must keep your notes.
 - Pen/pencil and ruler
 - Make sure your volume is on.
- 2) Watch the video and pause when you need to complete activities. You will see this icon when you need to pause. You should resume the video once you have completed the task.



- 3) This icon will help point you to some of the answers you are looking for- remember to try your best!
- 4) Re-watch the video if you need to go over anything again. Email Miss Angell/Mr Green for further help.



Just as World War Two was about to start in 1939, this helmet was dug out of the ground in Suffolk.....



Archaeologists investigated a number of mounds at Sutton Hoo in England. They found the remains of an Anglo-Saxon ship and a huge *cache* of seventh-century royal treasure.



Cache: a collection of items stored in a hidden place



[HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=HMKMI_WGGG&FEATURE=PLAYER EMBEDDED](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HMKMI_WGGG&feature=player_embedded)

The eyes and wings of the beast are inlaid with garnets which came from India or Sri Lanka!
What does this tell us?



Pause and have a go at the questions!



- *How old do you think this is?*
- *Which parts have been better preserved?*
- *How good would this helmet be at protecting its owner?*
- *Can you spot the beast on the helmet?*

A reconstruction of
the Sutton Hoo
Helmet



'THE DARK AGES'REALLY?!?!'

- Sutton Hoo changed ideas.
- The riches found at Sutton Hoo forced many Historians to change their views on the 'Dark Ages' (500-1500)
- It caused historians to re-think the idea of 'Dark Age' following the end of Roman rule and showed that the Anglo-Saxons were capable of great sophistication and had a network of international contacts beyond Britain.

Tasks: Choose one 😊

Chief Archaeologist

You are the lead Archaeologist on the Sutton Hoo Project and the local newspaper have asked you write a small article on the Sutton Hoo Helmet. It must be engaging, historically accurate but accessible to the general public. Best of luck!

Artist's Impression

Recreate the Sutton Hoo Helmet using your artistic flair. This could be an accurate, detailed illustration or something inspired by the dramatic finds at Sutton Hoo.





Further Investigation

Why is the helmet important?

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/objects/kpnm6FD3TOaNri1gNPGJ1w>

Sutton Hoo: A History

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/sutton-hoo>

Sutton Hoo Helmet: a book by Sonja Marzinzik

<https://www.britishmuseumshoponline.org/the-sutton-hoo-helmet.html>

Podcast with Neil MacGregor

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00t7kyv>

**OPTIONAL
READING**
**A HISTORY OF
THE WORLD IN
100 OBJECTS**
**– NEIL
MACGREGOR**

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Sutton Hoo Helmet

Anglo-Saxon helmet, found at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk, England
600–650 AD



From the heat of Arabia, the rise of the Islamic empire and the reshaping of Middle Eastern politics after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the next object takes us to the chill of East Anglia and a place where, just over seventy years ago, poetry and archaeology unexpectedly intersected and transformed our understanding of British national identity. The discovery of this object – a helmet – was part of one of the great archaeological finds of modern times. It speaks to us across the centuries, of poetry and battle and of a world centred on the North Sea.

At Sutton Hoo, a few miles from the Suffolk coast, one of the most exciting discoveries in British archaeology was made in the summer of 1939. Uncovering the tomb of an Anglo-Saxon who had been buried there in the early 600s, it profoundly changed the way people thought about what had been called the 'Dark Ages' – those centuries that followed the collapse of Roman rule in Britain. Angus Wainwright, the National Trust archaeologist for the East of England, sets the scene:

There are a number of large mounds, high up on an exposed ridge – about 100 feet up – looking down towards the River Deben. One of the

47: SUTTON HOO HELMET

biggest mounds, which we call, excitingly, Mound 1, is where the great ship grave was discovered in 1939, and we've got about eighteen or twenty other mounds around.

It was in this grave ship that the famous Sutton Hoo helmet was found, together with an astonishing range of valuable goods drawn from all over Europe: weapons and armour, elaborate gold jewellery, silver vessels for feasting, and many coins. Nothing like this had ever been found before from Anglo-Saxon England. The big puzzle, when the excavation took place, was that there was no body in the grave. But Angus Wainwright has an explanation:

People wondered whether this could be a cenotaph, a burial where the body had been lost – a sort of symbolic burial. But nowadays we think a body was buried in the grave but because of the special acidic conditions of this soil it just dissolved away. What you have to remember is that a ship is a watertight vessel, and when you put it in the ground the water percolating through the soil builds up in it and it basically forms an acid bath, in which all these organic things like the body and the leatherwork and the wood dissolve away, leaving nothing.

The discovery of this ship burial captured the British public's imagination – it was hailed as the 'British Tutankhamen'. But the politics of 1939 lent a disturbing dimension to the find: not only did the excavation have to be hurried because of the approaching war, but the burial itself spoke of an earlier, and successful, invasion of England by a Germanic-speaking people. Angus Wainwright describes what they found:

Very early on in the excavation they discovered ship rivets – the iron rivets that hold together the planks of a ship. They also discovered that the wood that had made up the ship had rotted completely away, but by a rather mysterious process the shape of the wood was preserved in a kind of crusted blackened sand. So by careful excavation they gradually uncovered the whole ship. The ship is 27 metres long; it's the biggest, most complete Anglo-Saxon ship ever found.

Ships were very important to these people. The rivers and the sea were their means of communication. It was much easier to go by water than it was by land at this time, so that people in, say, modern Swindon

would have been on the edge of the world to these people, whereas people in Denmark and Holland would have been close neighbours.

We still don't know who the owner of the boat was, but the Sutton Hoo helmet put a face on an elusive past, a face that has ever since gazed sternly out from books, magazines and newspapers. It has become one of the iconic objects of Britain's history.

It is the helmet of a hero, and when it was found, people were at once reminded of the great Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Beowulf*. Until 1939, it had been taken for granted that *Beowulf* was essentially fantasy, set in an imaginary world of warrior splendour and great feasts. The Sutton Hoo grave ship, with its cauldrons, drinking horns and musical instruments, its highly wrought weapons and lavish skins and furs, and not least its hoard of gold and silver, was evidence that *Beowulf*, far from being just poetic invention, was a surprisingly accurate memory of a splendid, lost, preliterate world.

Look at the helmet, decorated with animal motifs made out of gilded bronze and silver wire and bearing the marks of battle. Then see what *Beowulf* has to say:

To guard his head he had a glittering helmet
that was due to be muddied on the mere-bottom
and blurred in the upswirl. It was of beaten gold,
princely headgear hooped and hasped
by a weapon-smith who had worked wonders
in days gone by and embellished it with boar-shapes;
since then it had resisted every sword.

Clearly the Anglo-Saxon poet must have looked closely at something very like the Sutton Hoo helmet.

I asked the Nobel laureate and poet Seamus Heaney, who made that translation of *Beowulf*, what the Sutton Hoo helmet means to him:

I never thought of the helmet in relation to any historical character. In my own imagination it arrives out of the world of *Beowulf* and gleams at the centre of the poem and disappears back into the mound. The way to imagine it best is when it goes into the ground with the historical king or whoever it was buried with, then its gleam under the earth gradually dis-

appearing. There's a marvellous section in the *Beowulf* poem itself, 'The Last Veteran', the last person of his tribe burying treasure in the hoard and saying, lie there, treasure, you belong to earls – the world has changed. And he takes farewell of the treasure and buries it in the ground. That sense of elegy, a farewell to beauty and farewell to the treasured objects, hangs round the helmet, I think. So it belongs in the poem but obviously it belonged within the burial chamber in Sutton Hoo. But it has entered imagination, it has left the tomb and entered the entrancement of the readers of the poem, and the viewers of the object in the British Museum.

The Sutton Hoo helmet belonged of course not to an imagined poetic hero but to an actual historical ruler. The problem is, we don't know which one. It is generally supposed that the man buried with such style must have been a great warrior chieftain. Because all of us want to link finds in the ground with names in the texts, for a long time the favoured candidate was Raedwald, King of the East Angles, mentioned by the Venerable Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* and probably the most powerful king in all England around 620.

But we can't be sure, and it's quite possible that we may be looking at one of Raedwald's successors or, indeed, at a leader who's left no record at all. So the helmet still floats intriguingly in an uncertain realm on the margins of history and imagination. Seamus Heaney says:

Especially after 11 September 2001, when the firemen were so involved in New York, the helmet attained new significance for me personally because I had been given a fireman's helmet way back in the 1980s by a Boston fireman which was heavy, which was classically made, made of leather with copper and a metal spine on it and so on. I was given this and I had a great sense of receiving a ritual gift, not unlike the way Beowulf receives the gift from Hrothgar after he kills Grendel.

In a sense, the whole Sutton Hoo burial ship is a great ritual gift, a spectacular assertion of wealth and power on behalf of two people – the man who was buried there and commanded huge respect, and the man who organized this lavish farewell and commanded huge resources.

The Sutton Hoo grave ship brought the poetry of *Beowulf*

unexpectedly close to historical fact. In the process it profoundly changed our understanding of this whole chapter of British history. Long dismissed as the Dark Ages, this period, the centuries after the Romans withdrew, could now be seen as a time of high sophistication and extensive international contacts that linked East Anglia not just to Scandinavia and the Atlantic but ultimately to the eastern Mediterranean and beyond.

The very idea of ship burial is Scandinavian, and the Sutton Hoo ship was of a kind that easily crossed the North Sea, so making East Anglia an integral part of a world that included modern Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The helmet is, as you might expect, of Scandinavian design. But the ship also contained gold coins from France, Celtic hanging bowls from the west of Britain, imperial table silver from Byzantium and garnets which may have come from India or Sri Lanka. And while ship burial is essentially pagan, two silver spoons clearly show contact – direct or indirect – with the Christian world. These discoveries force us to think differently, not just about the Anglo-Saxons, but about Britain, for, whatever may be the case for the Atlantic side of the country, on the East Anglian side the British have always been part of the wider European story, with contacts, trade and migrations going back thousands of years.

As Seamus Heaney reminds us, the Anglo-Saxon ship burial here takes us at once to the world of *Beowulf*, the foundation stone of English poetry. Yet not a single one of the characters in *Beowulf* is actually English. They are Swedes and Danes, warriors from the whole of northern Europe, while the ship burial at Sutton Hoo contains treasures from the eastern Mediterranean and from India. The history of Britain that these objects tell is a history of the sea as much as of the land, of an island long connected to Europe and to Asia, which even in AD 600 was being shaped and reshaped by the world beyond its shores.

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