

Sutton Hoo

Aims

To provide students with visual encounters with key objects from Sutton Hoo.
To provide teachers with an opportunity to build student familiarity in terms of object identification and object vocabulary.
To provide a visual starting point for cross-curricular work on Sutton Hoo.

Description

- A sequence of 12 slides

Teaching ideas

- If you are planning to visit the British Museum, use the images to familiarise the students with objects they will be seeing in Room 41 at the Museum.
- Introduce vocabulary associated with the objects such as materials (silver, bronze, garnet), technical terms (millefiori, hinge, gilt), name of object (shield, sceptre, drinking horn), function of object (conflict, feasting, social status).
- Assign individual objects to student groups. Ask the group to research their object and then present their object to the rest of the class.
- Tell the story of the excavation of Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo in 1939. Ask students to present the story including key facts and figures and a description of some of the objects as a newspaper front page or a spoken news piece.
- Study the patterns, motifs and colours used on the different pieces and use this as a starting point for the students to create their own designs either based on a blank outline of one of the objects or for a different type of Anglo-Saxon object such as a brooch or a sword hilt.
- Discuss why the students think these objects were chosen to be placed in the burial mound.

Notes on the pictures

Slide 2: Photograph of excavation of Mound 1 in 1939

This photograph shows the outline of the ship in which the burial was placed. The bottom of the ship was set into a long trench dug into the ground and the outline of the decayed wooden planks and iron nails can clearly be seen. The heaps on each side are the soil which has been dug out of the mound. By this stage all the burial objects have been excavated to allow the archaeologists to continue digging downwards and outwards to reach the hull of the ship.

Slide 3: Shoulder clasps

The shoulder clasps were made in two halves which were hinged together and fastened by a pin. On the back are rows of loops for attaching them to clothing. The decoration on each half of the clasps is nearly identical - four panels of geometric cell-work within animal borders made from garnet cloisonné, chequerboard millefiori and blue glass. The four curved ends are filled with two entwined boars – the shoulders picked out in millefiori, tusks in blue glass and

spiky crests and curly tails in garnet. The boar was a protective symbol in early Anglo-Saxon England.

Slide 4: Gold belt buckle

This gold belt buckle weighs 412.7 grams. It is hollow and made in two parts (joined by a hinge) which can be locked together with a complex system of sliders and internal rods. It is possible that a precious object was stored inside the buckle. The surface is decorated with intertwining snakes and four legged creatures highlighted with tiny punched dents filled with black niello. At the tip of the buckle, two animals gently hold a tiny dog-like creature in their jaws. The two birds' heads on the shoulders have large curving beaks.

Slide 5: Purse clasp

The clasp was made for a leather money pouch. It hung by three hinged straps from a belt and was closed by a gold buckle. Seven gold, garnet *cloisonné* and millefiori glass plaques were set into the clasp (which has totally decayed but was probably made of whale-bone ivory). The plaques include images of a man standing between two wolves and an eagle swooping on its prey. The exact significance of these scenes is unknown.

Slide 6: Replica gold coins and ingots

Amongst the objects in the burial was a purse containing 37 gold coins, 3 coin-shaped blanks and 2 small gold ingots. The 3 blanks take the number of coins up to 40; coins to pay the men who would row the ship into the 'Otherworld' and the ingots to pay the steersmen. The coins all come from the kingdom of the Merovingian Franks on the Continent. The latest coin dates from around AD 625, so the burial was probably only a few years later.

Slide 7: Original pieces of helmet on resin mount (left) and reconstruction of helmet (right)

The helmet has panels decorated with interlacing animal ornament and heroic scenes. One scene shows two warriors, wearing horned helmets, holding short swords and down-turned spears. The other shows a mounted warrior trampling a fallen enemy. The face-mask has eye-sockets, eyebrows and a nose, which has two small holes cut in it to allow the wearer to breathe freely. The bronze eyebrows are inlaid with silver wire and garnets. Each ends in a gilt-bronze boar's-head. Placed against the top of the nose, between the eyebrows, is a gilded dragon-head that lies nose to nose with a similar dragon-head placed at the end of the low crest that runs over the cap. The nose, eyebrows and dragon make up a great bird with outstretched wings that flies on the helmet. The helmet was badly damaged when the burial chamber collapsed and not all of the pieces were found. A complete reconstruction has also been made.

Slide 8: Reconstruction of shield with original boss and shield mounts

Nothing remained of the shield except the iron boss and hand-grip since the wooden shield board had quickly decayed in the ground. The shield was reconstructed in leather stretched over a wooden board and decorated with the original gilded emblems, including a bird-of-prey on the right and a dragon on the left of the central boss. The iron boss is decorated with pairs of intertwined horses. Around the edge are gilt-bronze panels covered with interlacing animals and flanked by dragon's heads with garnet eyes. The shield was held by an iron grip behind the boss; also decorated with dragon and bird heads.

Slide 9: Sceptre – full view and detail of top section

The sceptre is a four-sided whetstone (for sharpening blades) with red painted knobs. At either end it is carved with faces, each with individual features, which may be portraits of ancestors. The sceptre is crowned with a stag - a symbol of strength and speed and 'king' of the forest. The whetstone is unused.

Slide 10: Reconstruction of drinking horns with original rims and terminals

These drinking horns, made from animal horns, would have been used for ceremonial drinking and feasting in a great hall. The end of the horn is decorated with a long, thin terminal while the open end used to drink from is protected by a silver-gilt rim binding.

Slide 11: Bronze hanging bowl

This bronze hanging bowl was made by British peoples living beyond the Anglo-Saxon controlled regions of Europe. The bowl was hung from three rings run through mounts fixed to the rim. The bowl has inlaid hook-mounts with square panels in between all decorated with red, blue and pale green enamel and inlaid glass. Inside is a small metal fish which suggests that the bowl may have held water for hand washing after a feast.

Slide 12: Silver bowls and spoons

The silver items were all made in the East Mediterranean region and may have come to East Anglia as a gift. Possession of the silver was a way of declaring wealth and status. The bowls are part of a set of ten that were probably used as tableware. Each is decorated with an equal-armed cross springing from a central roundel containing a floral motif. The spoons have deep, pear-shaped bowls and long handles inscribed in Greek with two names, Saulos and possibly Paulos.

Slide 13: Reconstruction of lyre

A lyre is a stringed musical instrument. This reconstruction is made of maple wood. It is straight-sided with a long sounding box. The pegs at the top could be turned to tune the strings of the instrument. Four metal plaques decorate the top of the lyre – two each side of the pegs. At the bottom is a bridge which lifts the six strings away from the sounding board so that they can vibrate to produce the musical sound.

Background information

- The Sutton Hoo ship burial is on display at the British Museum in Room 41. Other objects from the site can be seen at the National Trust Sutton Hoo Visitor Centre in Suffolk.
- Learn more about Sutton Hoo and the Anglo-Saxons at www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk
To find the burial, choose the Religion theme and move the timeline selector to between AD 400 and AD 1050, then choose Anglo-Saxon Britain.
- Recommended books:
Carver, Martin, *Sutton Hoo: a seventh-century princely burial ground and its context*, British Museum Press, 2005
Marzinzik, Sonja, *The Sutton Hoo Helmet*, British Museum Press, 2007