

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 10 slides

Teaching ideas

- If you are planning a visit to the British Museum, use the images to familiarize the students with some of the objects they will be seeing in Room 41 at the Museum.
- Introduce vocabulary associated with the objects such as materials (e.g. silver, bronze, garnet), technical terms (e.g. millifiori, hinge, gilt), name of object (e.g. shield, sceptre, drinking horn), function of object (e.g. 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.
- Discuss archaeological evidence from Sutton Hoo. What types of objects might survive in the ground and what might not survive? Why do some types of material survive better than others? What material are the objects on the PowerPoint made from? Does this material generally survive well in the ground? Do you think all evidence from Sutton Hoo is buried in the ground? What other archaeological evidence survives?
- 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, in the form of 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

Objects from Sutton Hoo on British Museum Collection Online database

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/search?place=Sutton%20Hoo&image=true&view=grid&sort=object_name_asc&page=1

Further information on each of the objects in the image bank can be found using the URL given below for each object.

Original pieces of helmet on mount (left) and reconstruction of helmet (right)

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1939-1010-93

The helmet has panels decorated with interlacing animals and heroic scenes; one shows two warriors, wearing horned helmets, holding swords and spears, the other a mounted warrior trampling a fallen enemy. The face-mask has eye-sockets, eyebrows and a nose with two small holes to allow the wearer to breathe freely. The bronze eyebrows are inlaid with silver wire and garnets and end in a boars-head. Between the eyebrows, is a dragon-head that lies nose to nose with another dragon-head. 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 been made.

Shoulder clasps

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1939-1010-4-a

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.

Gold belt buckle

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1939-1010-1

The gold belt buckle is hollow and made in two parts (joined by a hinge) which can be locked with a 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.

Purse lid

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1939-1010-2-a-l

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.

Gold coins and ingots

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_1939-1003-3

Among 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 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 in mainland Europe. The newest coin dates to around AD 625, so the burial was probably only a few years later.

Buckle from sword belt

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1939-1010-11

A gold buckle from a sword belt with a rectangular panel of inlaid garnet cloisonné work formed of a mass of irregular cells, with cloisonné borders along each long side. At the end of the buckle is a shelf, set slightly lower than the rectangular plate, set with three gold rivets which connect with the plain gold back-plate.

Shield

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1939-1010-94

Nothing remained of the wooden shield except the iron boss and decorative front pieces. The shield was reconstructed in leather stretched over a wooden board and decorated with the original 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.

Sceptre – full view (left) and detail of top section (right)

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1939-1010-160

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.

Hanging bowl

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1939-1010-110

The bronze hanging bowl was suspended from three rings run through mounts fixed to the rim. The bowl has inlaid hook-mounts with square panels in between 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.

Silver bowls and spoons

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1939-1010-79

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.