

Insula de Burgh: Excavations at Burrow Hill, Butley, Suffolk 1978-1981

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This site, formerly an island, was intensively used in the Middle Saxon period. Radiocarbon, coins and metalwork date it from the late 7th to the early 9th centuries. An iron cauldron-chain found in 1963 and coins from the 1980-1 excavations are described in parts II and III. Residual sherds and flint suggest that the summit of the hill was utilised in the Neolithic and Early Middle Bronze Ages. Pre-Belgic Iron Age, possibly 4th-century B.C., domestic structures have been found.

THE EXCAVATIONS

Introduction

In 1977 fragments of a cauldron-chain in Ipswich Museum were examined by the author in connexion with a study of the chainwork from the Sutton-Hoo ship-burial (Fenwick 1983). The cauldron-chain had been discovered at a depth of 1.2 m by Mr. Roland Clark while digging gravel on the summit of Burrow Hill, and loaned to the Museum by the landowner, Sir Peter Greenwell, Bt. A visit to the site in March 1978 established its archaeological potential and the fact that this was continuing to be destroyed at a rate of approximately 150 square metres per annum. Sir Peter readily agreed to delay gravel-extraction for a short time and, after consultation with the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments and the County Archaeologist, a small rescue-excavation was undertaken by the author assisted by Miss Jane Weeks. Excavation was resumed later in 1978 and has taken place in 1979, 1980 and 1981 with the assistance of Mr Paul McCulloch. The site gives up its secrets reluctantly, but enough of interest has been discovered to merit a report at this stage. (May 1982).

Topography

Burrow Hill (TM3948; S.A.U. BUT 001) is an 18 ha. pasture in the parish of Butley and hundred of Plomesgate. It lies 10 km (6.2 miles) due east of Sutton Hoo (Fig. 8) from which it is separated by typical Sandling heath partly covered with Forestry

* Sir Peter Greenwell actively encouraged the excavation up to the time of his death and I am most grateful to his family for allowing the work to continue. The staff of Butley Abbey Farm and the people of Butley, Capel, Boyton and Chillesford have helped in numerous ways. The efforts of all members of the Butley Excavation Group, as we constituted ourselves, made this report possible, but space only permits me to mention here Elizabeth Nichols, Jeremy Oetgen, Damian Goodburn, Robert Beardsley, Wendy Dalrymple-

Commission conifers. Composed of Pleistocene red crag with seams of malleable yellow clay, the hill has a cap of glacial gravel and rises 15m above former salt marsh, now inned. Today it forms part of the embankment of the Butley River 1.6 km above its confluence with the Ore and the shingle bank separating it from the sea (Fig. 1). The Butley River has its source close to the presumed site of a palace of the Wuffingas, at Rendlesham, and flows past prehistoric, Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon settlements (Maynard 1952, 207-8) on the highest ground in Butley parish before its waters meet the incoming tide. Burrow Hill was formerly an island on its west bank, cut off from dry land by a stretch of tidal mudflats. Since these marshes today lie approximately 1.25 m below ordinary high tides, there is little reason to doubt that they were covered by the tide in Anglo-Saxon times¹. At an unknown date, the hill was connected to the mainland by a causeway 450 m long known as the Thrift. This construction may antedate the ownership of the land by the Augustinian canons of Butley Priory, founded in 1171, for whom the island was the main stepping-stone in their ferry-route to Orford. Certainly the ferry house constructed on it was sufficiently important to be marked on a 16th-century chart.² The flat hilltop is in a prominent position, exposed to every wind, but with extensive views in all directions, particularly seawards. The medieval name

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