



Different skills were required to stitch the planks together using twisted and cracked yew branches and applying tension. The seams were then covered with pads of moss covered with battens which further tensioned the stitches

The greatest skill was needed to make accurately all the cleats, joints and stitch holes in a Bronze-Age boat. A recent discovery in Capel St Andrew by David Boast suggests that a specialist must once have been at work there near a stream which flows into the Butley river. The find is a superb little palstave that would have been used for fine woodworking. It is of the same design as the larger tool found best suited to shaping most of the Dover Boat reconstruction, while chisels and small tools were required to carve details like mortices.

The Suffolk coast happens to lie on the sea-route between the Humber and the south of England. Distribution maps of Bronze-Age finds and funeral mounds show a concentration in East Suffolk. In addition three caches of tools and weapons were buried within a mile of the palstave. A gold torc was found in the next parish and there was a cremation cemetery on nearby Burrow Hill, a former island at the confluence of the stream with the Butley estuary. The area was clearly populous and prosperous. Could David's beautiful tool be evidence that sewn wooden boats may have been built here in the Bronze Age? It may seem merely guesswork, but archaeologists are detectives and depend on clues.

Notes

Photographs are by the author and the drawings by Caroline Caldwell.
I am grateful to David Boast for permitting me to study the little palstave.
The conserved boat is on display in a special gallery in Dover Museum.