



Newsheet of the Northamptonshire Archaeological Society

18 JUN 1997

27 GUILDHALL ROAD

ROYAL FINDS FROM A SAXON GRAVE

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On April the 22nd, both television, radio and newspapers reported the story of a remarkable archaeological find in Northamptonshire. A pagan Saxon burial had been found in a gravel pit near Wollaston with grave goods that included an iron sword, a bronze hanging bowl and most exceptionally, an iron helmet, only the fourth such find in the entire country. The human remains associated with the metal finds were in a poor condition but it was possible to deduce that they belonged to a man in middle age. The sword is approximately a metre in length with a blade made from iron rods woven and then beaten into shape. Traces of a wooden scabbard with a woollen lining were also found. The bronze bowl is approximately 6 inches in diameter and decorated with a small millefiori escutcheon. The helmet is made of iron and has a nose guard, crested cheek guards and the figure of a boar mounted on its crest. In this latter feature, it closely resembles a mid seventh century helmet found in 1861 at Bentley Grange in Derbyshire. The boar figure's association with helmets is well known from several written sources, most notably in the epic poem Beowulf.

*"And the best warrior of the scylding race was ready for the burning,
Displayed on his pyre, plain to see were the bloody mail shirts,
The boars on the helmet, iron hard and gold clad".*

The scarcity of such rich burials implies that the individual interred must have been a member of a local royal family. The finds are currently being conserved at the School of Archaeological Studies at Leicester University, a process which will take at least another nine months. When this has been completed, it is hoped that a permanent home will be found for the collection in Northamptonshire but the location for this remains the subject of discussion given the continuing refusal of Northampton Museum to accept archaeological finds from outside the borough of Northampton.

The full story of this find, together with associated fieldwork around Wollaston, will be detailed in a lecture for the N.A.S. by Ian Meadows of Northamptonshire Archaeology. For full details, see the list of summer events on the back of this Newsletter.

AN IRON AGE SITE AT WELBY

Cotswold Archaeological Trust have recently completed a rescue excavation in advance of development next to the A45 between Wellingborough and Wilby. The site included a number of roundhouse gulleys, boundary ditches and an unusual 3 sided enclosure. This latter feature was delimited by a 2 metre deep 'v' shaped ditch. These features are almost certainly related to an Iron Age site that was published in Volume 16 of Northamptonshire Archaeology (Great Doddington Iron Age Enclosure by D Windell)

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

SATURDAY 14th JUNE

The spring meeting of the Roman Finds Group will be held at the Verulamium Museum at St Albans. The day will include an opportunity to look around the museum and hear about recent excavations in the area. Further details are available from Roy Friendship-Taylor, 86 Main Road, Hackleton, Northampton, NN7 2AD.

UP TO JUNE 15th

An exhibition, 'Through Celtic Mist, Life and Ritual in the Iron Age' currently on show at Northampton Museum is due to close on June 15th. The displays feature exact copies of some famous finds such as the Battersea Shield and the Desborough Mirror as well as original material from the county which including the finds from Rainsborough Hillfort, which have never previously been on public display.

SATURDAY, 21st - SUNDAY 22nd JUNE

The Mercenary Guild, a 14th century re-enactment group will be setting up camp at the Prebendal Manor House in Nassington amidst the newly created Medieval Garden. There will be displays of Falconry and Archery.

TUESDAY, JULY 1st .

At 8 p.m, Ian Meadows of Northamptonshire Archaeology will be giving a lecture at the University Centre on Barrack Road, Northampton entitled : "The Prince and the Paupers. Recent Fieldwork and the Find of an Anglo-Saxon Royal Grave at Wollaston". This will detail not only the discovery of the remarkable burial but will elucidate other discoveries at the site, in particular the first known Roman vineyard in Britain. Admission Free.

AUGUST , SUNDAY AND WEDNESDAY AFTERNOONS

Excavations will be proceeding at the Prebendal Manor House at Nassington, a high status Medieval site with Anglo-Saxon origins. A digging team from the Czech Republic will be carrying out the work and visitors to the site are welcome on Sunday and Wednesday afternoons. Given the nature of the site, a visit in the latter half of the month will probably be the most rewarding.

SATURDAY, 23rd AUGUST

From 11 a.m. to 5 p.m , the excavations of the Roman villa at Piddington will be open to the public. There will be a small admission charge with guided tours, a small exhibition, a bookstall and refreshments available at the site.

SATURDAY, 20th SEPTEMBER

There will be an informal tour of the village and surrounding earthworks of Wadenhoe, led by Graham Cadman of Northamptonshire Heritage. Meet at 10.30 a.m in the Village Hall car park

SATURDAY, 20th - SUNDAY 21st SEPTEMBER

The annual meeting of the Congress of Independent Archaeologists will be held at Nottingham University on the theme of the Best of British Archaeology. Finalists in the recent Pitt Rivers Award will be invited to present their discoveries as will some of the leading professional archaeologists. Further details are available from Mike Rumbold, 3 West Street, Weedon Bec, Northants NN7 4QU.