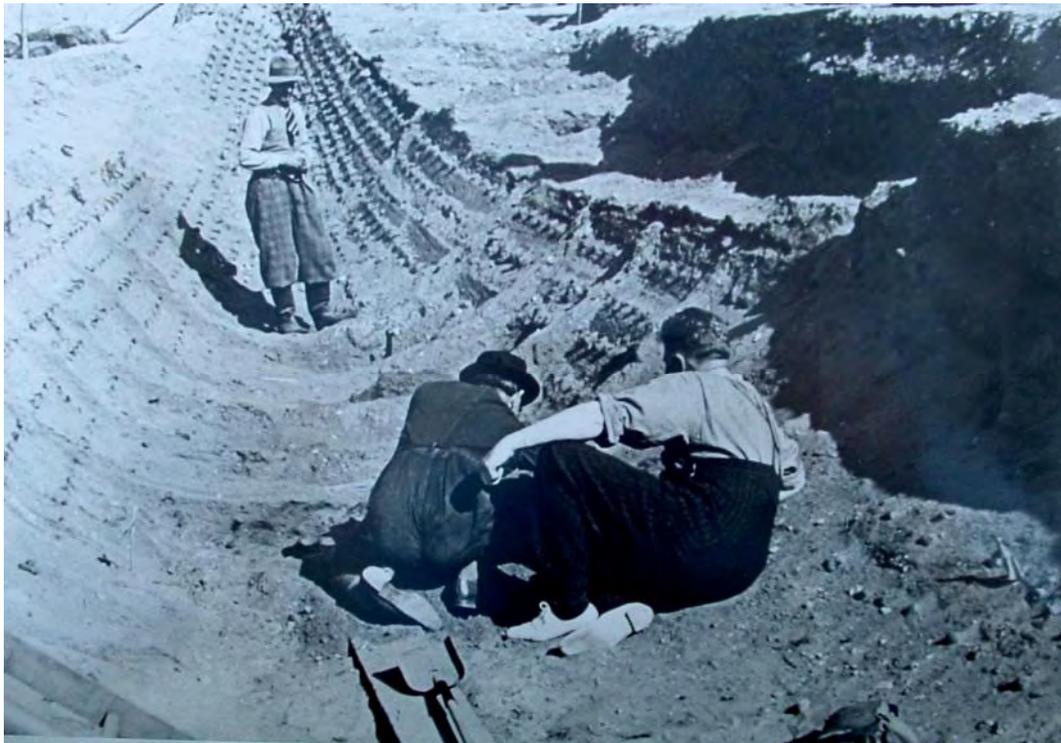


## **A Memory of Long Ago with an ever-lasting Effect**

***Ellen Goldman***

We miss so much when we are children – for what do we know of ancient times when we are young, and how could we, therefore, interpret the things we see and hear other than in a haze of half-forgotten, vaguely remembered exploits such as family picnics in the woods, cycling trips to the beach, or holidays abroad. And sometimes, when our mind is taken up by other important things, these vague memories seem to vanish altogether. Yet, there are times when, touched by some unexpected happening, such memories, though seemingly forgotten for long periods of time, will suddenly come back to us in full force.

It was 1939. My parents had gone on a summer vacation in Switzerland, leaving my sister and me in the care of our Auntie Nell and her daughter Nancy. Auntie Nell was really our father's aunt and 'cousin Nancy' was of our father's age. My nine-year old sister and I found the two ladies VERY old indeed. We children used to play together in the terraced garden of auntie's house and apparently we were such quiet girls that our aunt began to find us 'nice things to do'. One glorious day we were taken on a picnic. We had never been on a picnic before, so this was quite an adventure. We went to see one of auntie's friends, ('You may call her Auntie Pretty', our aunt said), and we had our picnic on 'auntie Pretty's' grounds in Sutton Hoo.



*Sutton Hoo*

Our family lived in Holland, and my sister and I attended Dutch schools. All our little friends were Dutch, and English did not come easily for us. We knew many words but how to put them in good sentences, or the difference between adjectives and adverbs was still a mystery to us. The difference between a 'pretty auntie' and auntie Pretty was beyond our understanding, and my sister and I laughed at this lady being called Pretty while she was, in our eyes, terribly old and not pretty at all. I also remember a little boy, probably Aunty Pretty's son or grandson, who was told to play with the dear little Dutch girls, and his reaction: 'Oh dear, not now...' But for a long time that was all I remembered of what must have been a glorious holiday for us. For the rest my memories were vague, probably repressed by the beginning of WW -II in 1940 and by the following occupation of the country in which we lived. Cold, hunger and fear left little time to remember former holidays, and when, at last, the war was over, we were probably too busy catching up with our lives that there was no time from remembering.

In 1960 I married John, a Dutch fellow student whom I had met at Leyden University where both of us studied chemistry. Later, I went back to university to study English language and literature. It was during these latter studies that I came across an article describing the art of enamelling as practised by the Celts. I was intrigued, and I wondered if, perhaps, it was possible to learn this craft myself. With a small kiln, just a few colours and many questions I set out on what was to become a favourite pastime for me. One of my professors who came to see my first solo exhibition, later gave me an article about the treasures found in the Sutton Hoo Burial Ground, pointing out that, although this was not a Celtic but an Anglo-Saxon site, he was sure the article would be of interest to me, seeing my interest in enamelling.

As I was reading, I was suddenly overwhelmed with memories. I suddenly realized that this was the place of the picnic where our great -aunt had taken us; that 'auntie Pretty' had allowed us to be present at an excavation of immense importance. What else could I remember? Not much, at the beginning. I put the article aside and began thinking. Had I seen the SHIP? No, I hadn't.. but why, then, had I played in our parents' garden, back in Holland again after the holidays, digging out the shape of a boat in the earth after the cherry tree had fallen down and the trunk and roots had been carried off, and nothing else had replaced them for a while?

I began reading up on Sutton Hoo, and when on holiday in England with my husband and children, we visited the British Museum. I was amazed at the beauty of the things we saw there... and we were lucky, for just at that time the museum had staged a special exhibition on the Sutton Hoo Burial. As we were looking round it dawned on me how much I had missed as a child, and how fortunate I was to be able to see this large exhibition. Many things seemed familiar to me then, even while I knew I could not

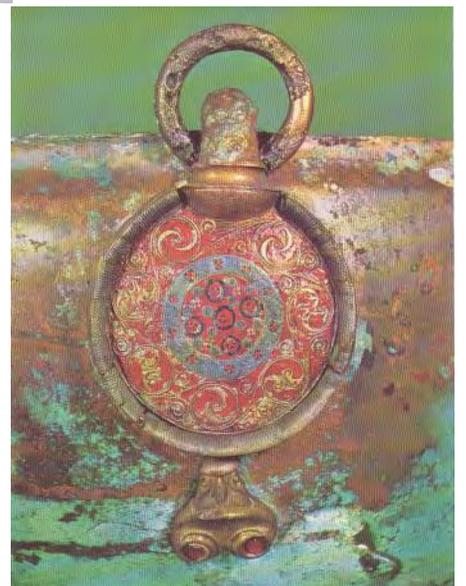
possibly have seen them in 1939. Still, there was this strange feeling of recognition.

What struck me most during our visit to the British Museum was the ship that had been re-constructed from the imprints left in the earth. It was much larger than I had remembered or imagined. Then there was a helmet, a beautiful replica of the original helmet. Only bits and pieces of the helmet had been found and I was amazed at the skill of the makers of this replica, made in the Royal Armeries of the Tower of London. It was, at the time, exhibited next to the reconstruction of the helmet from the pieces that were found. It has cheek pieces which function as blinkers. It made me think how difficult that must have been while fighting, as the wearer could only have been able to see straight ahead.



There were also several hanging bowls, the largest of which was of particular interest to me: it had a pedestal in the centre with a bronze fish standing on top of it. The fish had obviously been enamelled, for specks of turquoise blue enamel were clearly visible on it. It also had enamelled plaques

on the outside, but it was the fish that particularly intrigued me. Was it possible that I had seen this fish before? One day, when playing in the garden, I had found a dead goldfish in the pond and had put it on a stump of wood in the middle of a flowerpot. My mother had given me a friendly scolding for playing with a dead fish and I had buried it beneath the hydrangea bush. But now I wonder: could it have been the fish in the bowl that had lingered in my mind and that I had tried to copy? I shall never know... but just imagine that you'd have a soup pan in your kitchen with such a fish standing up in the middle: it would be as if the fish was swimming in the soup!



There is also a 'ceremonial whetstone'. I have put this in inverted commas as it seems that the scholars have not really been able to find out the purpose of this whetstone. It is about one metre long, and it weighs several kilos. This really makes it too heavy and too cumbersome to handle as a whetstone. One of the ends carries an iron ring, and this ring is topped with a bronze stag. This is why some scholars believe it to be a ceremonial sceptre, while others think that people must have believed the whetstone to have magical powers. We also saw jewelry, purses, coins... too many things to mention in this short article.

The excavations had been completed in 1939, and when WW -II started the ship was covered up with bracken. In 1966 the barrow was re-opened. This was the time when the ship itself was cast in plaster, so that the shape of the ship can now be seen at the British Museum. It was at about this time that chemical tests were done to find the answer to one of the mysteries of the Sutton Hoo burial: what had happened to the body of the person buried here? No body had been found, the question was: had it been in the grave at all? Some scholars said that there might not have been a body, for the ship was probably buried in the 7th century. At this time there were still many pagan kings, and they would have been burned at their death. Others pointed to the find of two spoons, one with the image of Paul, the other with the image of Saul. Such spoons were given as presents at baptism ceremonies. And Christian Kings were buried at the time. The soil in Sutton Hoo is acid. A body may be totally disintegrated by the acid, but the disintegration of the bones should have left a high concentration of phosphates in the soil. This could, at first, not be established. Later (in the 60s) it was, however, discovered that the rusted iron of the sword, usually left alongside of a body at the time of the burial, had an unusual phosphate concentration. So it was considered proven that a body must have lain in the usual place.

Most scholars now agree that the grave must have been that of Raedwald, the last pagan King of East Anglia. He died in the year 624 or 625.

Now WHY is the Sutton Hoo ship at the British Museum? It was certainly not TREASURE TROVE... For Treasure Trove means that something that is found in the ground was originally put there in order to retrieve it at a later date. If something is considered Treasure Trove, it belongs to the State. It is obvious that the treasure of Sutton Hoo does not fall into this category. Mrs. Pretty, the owner of the grounds, was declared to be the owner of the find during a special inquest into the matter. She donated everything to the Museum as she decided that this was where it belonged.