



History // English

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Fantastic Finds

Anglo-Saxon drinking horn

Educational Resource // Activity

From, Land of the Fanns Online Resource

Key Stage

Key Stage 2.

About this find

This Saxon glass drinking horn is one of a pair. It is very rare, only 3 have been found in the whole of England and 2 are from here in Rainham! Similar horns have been found in France and Germany. Drinking horns like this would have been used at special feasts and they would have been buried in the grave of an important Saxon person so that they could continue to drink and party in their afterlife.

KEY FACTS

FOUND: in 1937, in a Saxon burial ground discovered by workers digging for gravel at Gerpin's Lane, Rainham

NOW: the British Museum (not on public display). Replica in Havering Museum and more finds from the burial ground are at the Valence House Museum.

MATERIAL: glass

MADE: 6th or 7th Century (AD 550-700)

TIMELINE:



What other events were happening around the world at this time?

AD 610- Islam is founded

AD 620- Discovery of Antarctica by Polynesian Māoris (New Zealand)

Think like an archaeologist!

Look carefully at the **drinking horns**. What questions do you have about them?

Who?

What?

When?



Where?

Why?

How?



Think like and archaeologist:

The Saxon cemetery at Gerpin's Lane

The acidic soil meant that no skeletons were found, instead their bones had dissolved over time. Sadly, the burial ground was also not recorded by archaeologists.

We don't know how many people were buried there.

The only information we have comes from some special artefacts, found by the gravel workers, which would once have been buried with the dead for their afterlife.

Unfortunately, we don't know which graves the objects were buried in or which artefacts were buried together.

What was found?



Metal shield bosses, like this one, which would have been in the middle of a wooden shield.



7 spearheads like this one



A possible seax (a Saxon knife)

At least 2 swords



The gravel workers also found pottery, buckets, 3 bronze brooches, 2 glass beads, a ring, and a gold coin showing the Byzantine emperor Maurice Tiberius (AD 582-602) which had been used in a necklace.



This gold coin from Sarre, Kent showing emperor Maurice Tiberius has also been turned into a necklace pendant.

© The Trustees of the British Museum

The fragile glass drinking horns and the gold coin tell us that important Saxon people may have been buried at the cemetery because these are rare and expensive objects.

The drinking horns would have been made by hand by a very skilled craftsman in England or crafted abroad and then brought here by traders.

Which fantastic Saxon finds from Rainham can you spot in this photograph from 1953?



Pupils from Chase Cross School Romford visiting the Saxon Essex exhibition at Valence House, 1953.

© Valence House Museum

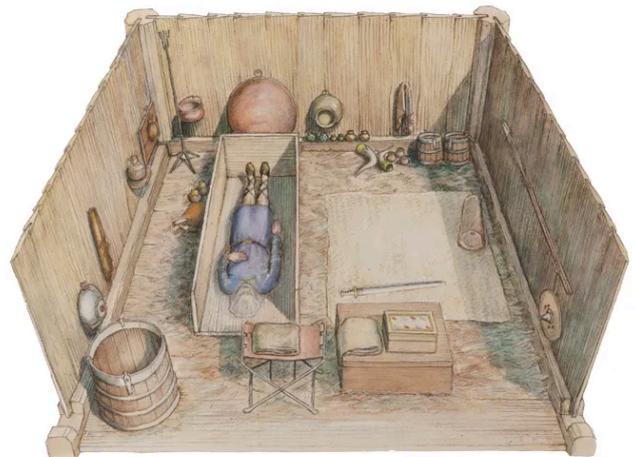
The Saxon **Prittlewell Prince** burial, found in Southend-on-Sea, Essex and the **Sutton Hoo** burial mounds in Suffolk, also include rare artefacts made from precious materials and date to around the same time as the Rainham drinking horns. Both of these sites were carefully excavated by archaeologists but acidic soils also meant that skeletons were not found. Only tiny traces of tooth enamel were discovered at Prittlewell.



Excavating the princely burial at Prittlewell

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An artistic reconstruction of the Prittlewell burial by Faith Vardy showing the grave goods which would help the dead person in the afterlife



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Cross-curricular classroom links:

ENGLISH: why not explore the Anglo-Saxon hero **Beowulf's** adventures?

The epic poem **Beowulf** is set in the 6th Century and tells of the **Geat** hero's battles with the monster Grendel and a dragon. Fortunately, the Old English has been updated and there are excellent versions for Key Stage 2 pupils.

The Saxons were also big fans of alliteration and wordplay so look out for kennings too!