



A Royal Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Loftus

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The Anglo-Saxon period used to be known as the 'Dark Ages', a period after the Romans left Britain, now considered to begin between AD 410 and AD 420. The native people who lived in Britain, who could consider the Celtic tribes as their forebears, continued to tend crops and rear livestock across northeast England. At this time, from the 5th century, a period of Anglo-Saxon migration occurred with people from Angeln in North Germany and southern Denmark settling on the East Coast between Northumberland and East Anglia. These first generations of migrants to our shores were pagan in faith, and cemeteries associated with this period are known at Norton, Saltburn and Hornsea.

In the 7th century the small groups of settlers and native Britons had formed tribal alliances, and Christianity began to emerge at the same time as kingdoms were developing. In this period of change new beliefs emerged and changing practices of burial can be seen with the emergence of 'Conversion Period' cemeteries.

The most significant Conversion Period cemetery in northeast England was excavated at Street House, near Loftus, between 2005 and 2007. The ritual of burial associated with objects changes at this time. In the 6th century weapon burials are associated with some male

graves, while the type of objects found in female graves include bronze annular brooches and sleeve clasps, and large numbers (over 100) of amber beads. By the 7th century graves contained fewer objects, and glass beads are found in small clusters along with ornate pendants, worn on a chain, such as the Street House example.

In the centre of the Street House cemetery was a burial that contained a significant amount of ironwork around the edge of a burial chamber, with three gold pendants. This burial is the only known Anglo-Saxon 'bed burial' in northeast England. The term relates to the fact that an individual is interred lying upon a bed. This type of burial dates from AD 640–660 and is a rite known after the conversion from pagan practices to Christianity. In total there are 17 burials of this type currently known in England, mostly in East Anglia and southern England from Dorset and Wiltshire, and they are a type of female burial, with one exception, which may be an anomaly. It is suggested by some people that high-status royal females are placed on a decorated bed whilst males of similar status are buried with weapons, drinking vessels, horses, or perhaps a boat as indicators of esteem.

Within the group of known bed burials the contents of the grave can vary. Whilst some contain few

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finds, the Street House burial contained a number of high-status objects, but it also differed in several respects. The bed was made of ash and the ironwork, although similar in function to that of other examples - with headboard stays, plates and nails - was much more ornate. The grave also contained two gold cabochon pendants (just one would be rare in any grave) and the Street House gold pendant.

The Street House pendant is unique in the Anglo-Saxon world. It is made of gold and measures 37mm by 27mm. The pendant has a loop for suspension on a chain and it is a piece of exceptional craftsmanship. There are 57 small cells containing reused garnets cut and shaped with a degree of skill comparable with jewellery from Sutton Hoo in Suffolk. The centrepiece of the pendant is a larger gemstone with a number of incised lines that form the

shape of a scallop shell. The scallop is a motif occasionally found on Christian sarcophagi and is associated with the Apostle St James. Clearly, whoever was the owner and wearer of the pendant had wealth, status and access to the best craftsmen in Anglo-Saxon England. The jewellery, allied to the burial chamber, bed and uniqueness of the find in northeast England, indicates that the person buried at Street House was of high status: hence the term 'Anglo-Saxon Princess'.

The discovery of the Street House Anglo-Saxon cemetery has led to many further questions about who the Princess was, where she lived and what she was doing at Street House. Archaeological research at Street House continues in the search for an Anglo-Saxon village in the immediate area of the cemetery.



Find out more

The finds from the excavation can be seen at Kirkleatham Museum, Kirkleatham, Redcar TS10 5NW,
<http://www.redcar-cleveland.gov.uk/kirkleathamuseum>

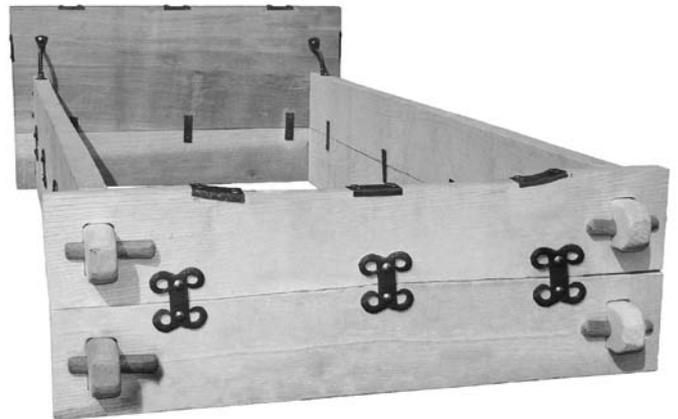
Saxon Princess Trail (Loftus): Self-guided walk leaflet available at
<https://www.walkingloftusandthenorthyorkshirecoast.com/self-guided-walks>



The Street House pendant (gold and garnets)



Gold filigreed pendant found at Street House



Replica of ash-wood bedstead used in Loftus bed-burial