

THE BOOK OF HAPPISBURGH

Mary Trett & Richard Hoggett

Famous for the erosion which has dramatically reshaped its coastline, the north-east Norfolk village of Happisburgh can truly claim to have witnessed the full range of human history. Recent archaeological excavations on Happisburgh beach have found internationally significant evidence for the earliest human occupation so far discovered in northern Europe, while on the clifftops above stand the medieval church, the Arts and Crafts Happisburgh manor and the iconic lighthouse, the only independently operated lighthouse in the United Kingdom. The fields surrounding the settlement have revealed traces of prehistoric burial mounds and a Roman farmstead, and also contain the remains of a significant Second World War radar station.

This book presents Happisburgh's rich archaeological and historical heritage, using archaeological drawings, aerial images, historical documents, old photographs and personal recollections to tell the story of this coastal community whose residents have literally lived their lives on the edge.

The book is interspersed with biographies of local characters, which help to tell the story of everyday life, as well as revealing little-known episodes such as the case of the Happisburgh poisoner! Famous visitors are also highlighted, including artists J.M.W. Turner, Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth, and author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Mary Trett was born in Happisburgh, where she still lives, and has studied and written extensively about its history.

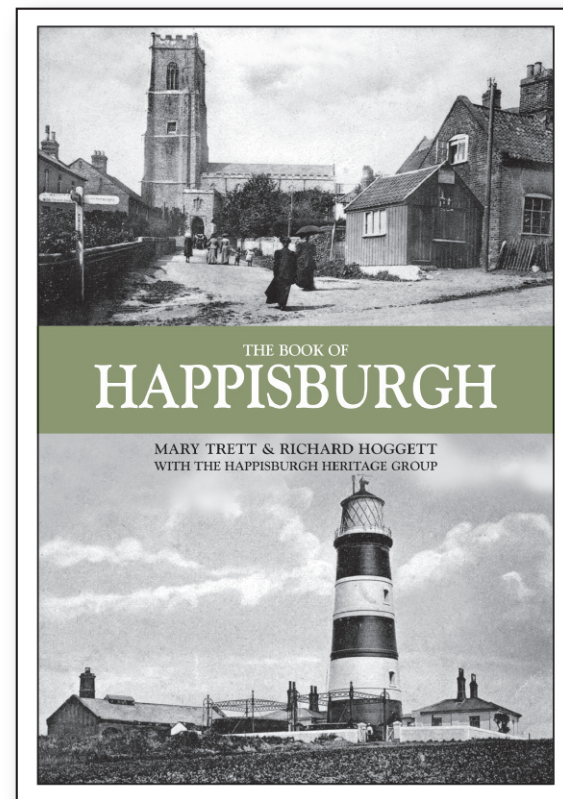
Dr Richard Hoggett has been an archaeologist for 15 years and is currently the Coastal Heritage Officer for Norfolk County Council's Historic Environment Service.

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Halsgrove House,
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Tel: 01823 653777
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e-mail: sales@halsgrove.com

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Fishermen at work on Happisburgh beach in the 1930s. Their practices have remained largely unchanged for generations.

Left: Happisburgh lighthouse undergoing repainting in 1907. (From the Neil Storey Archive)



An aerial photograph of Happisburgh taken in June 2007, showing the dramatic effects of the erosion to the south of the village where the sea defences have failed (© Mike Page)

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The cropmarks of the possible Iron Age/Roman-British farmstead (NH&R 38744), as identified by the National Mapping Programme. The cropmarks of the enclosure are picked out in black, while the cropmarks of the surrounding field-system are in grey. (Cropmark transcriptions © English Heritage/Norfolk County Council; Mapping © Crown copyright and database right 2011 Ordnance Survey 100019360)

An aerial photograph looking south taken in July 1977 showing the cropmarks of possible Iron Age/Roman-British farmstead (NH&R 38744). © Norfolk County Council. Photograph by D.A. Edwards: TG3829/A/GKFS)

Chapter 4
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Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Happisburgh

It is generally accepted that the Roman period ended in the early decades of the fifth century, when the Roman authorities withdrew their administration and, more significantly, their army from Britain in order to concentrate on the defence of Rome from barbarian invaders (Wacher 1998, 295–300). Into this vacuum came settlers from the coastal lands of north-western Europe and Scandinavia, who brought with them a very different material culture, and within a couple of centuries East Anglia was thoroughly Anglo-Saxon in character. There has been much debate about the nature of this migration, particularly regarding how many people may have actually migrated and whether their settlement was peaceful or violent. However, as with the transition from the Iron Age to the Roman period, the vast majority of the population appear to have continued to live the same lives as they always had, albeit with a new material culture (Williamson 1993, 49–72; Penn 2005).

From an archaeological point of view, the break from Rome is very clear to see, as the production of coinage ceased, societies lapsed back to using handmade pottery and timber again became the preferred building material, effectively rendering many Anglo-Saxon buildings archaeologically invisible. Funerary practices changed dramatically too, with cremation and furnished burial both being practised during the Early Anglo-Saxon period, before the arrival of Christianity in the seventh century (Hoggett 2010, 1–6, 81–115).

A great restructuring of the landscape occurred during the Middle Anglo-Saxon period – broadly the mid-seventh to mid-eighth centuries – which saw the establishment of the features and institutions which went to shape the English landscape for much of the next thousand years. Foremost among these changes was the major dislocation of settlements, which saw numerous and disparate Early Anglo-Saxon settlements coalesce into more permanent nucleated settlements, most of them the precursors of the villages which we know today. Happisburgh being no exception (Rippon 2008, 138–200). Closely bound up with these changes was the establishment of the church, which has remained firmly at the heart of village life in Happisburgh ever since (Hoggett 2010, 116–62).

Early Anglo-Saxon
The Early Anglo-Saxon period broadly spans the fifth to the seventh centuries AD, during which time the Roman influence faded and Anglo-Saxon culture took hold. As was referred to above, it is difficult to see the Early Anglo-Saxons in the archaeological record very clearly, but enough artefacts have been discovered in Happisburgh to indicate an Early Anglo-Saxon presence in the parish. As might be expected, several artefacts have been discovered in the vicinity of the Roman farmsteads discussed in the previous chapter, suggesting that a degree of occupation continued at those sites which would be very much in keeping with patterns observed elsewhere in the county. A copper-alloy brooch was recovered from the site of the Whimpwell Green farmstead (NH&R 17351), while a broken fragment of another brooch was found not far away to the south (NH&R 49809), as was a quantity of possibly Early Anglo-Saxon pottery (NH&R 50273). Early Anglo-Saxon mate-



In the 19th and 20th centuries, many goods were sold from the backs of carts that visited the village.