

SUTTON ENVIRONMENT & HISTORY GROUP
and SUTTON WALLS CONSERVATION GROUP

Bodyguards or Marauders?

**Exploring the context of the Sutton Walls
Early Medieval execution pit.**

A talk by Professor Keith Ray

Monday 18th March

Doors open at 7.00pm, talk starts at 7:30pm.

Entrance £3.00. Cash only please.

**Sutton St Nicholas Village Hall,
Bayley Way, HR1 3SZ.**

Refreshments will be available, including cakes and wine, and there will be a Raffle.

For more details email suttonwallscg@gmail.com
Or <https://www.suttonwalls.co.uk/events-and-involvement>

Sutton Environment and History Group and Sutton Walls Conservation Group Joint Event.

Bodyguards or Marauders? Exploring the context of the Sutton Walls Early Medieval execution pit' A talk by Professor Keith Ray

Synopsis:

'The (twenty-four) skeletons are at all angles and in all positions, obviously thrown in haphazard. Some lie singly, some in a veritable pile. At least six had been decapitated, and the heads thrown in beside them, and in other cases the head is in a very unnatural position, as if partially severed. Others show wound marks... All appear to be males, mostly in the prime of life....' (Kathleen Kenyon, 1954, 9).

This talk takes as its point of departure, this description of a mass burial pit, dug hastily into one of the partially silted-up hillfort ditches and then infilled unceremoniously with these clearly deliberately executed males. Less than half of the pit was excavated in 1950-1, so it can comfortably be deduced that the unfortunate group once included upwards of fifty individuals. The context of the executions was deduced by Kenyon to have been immediately after the Roman army had stormed the hillfort in the aftermath of the Claudian invasion of AD43. The problem with this interpretation is that there is no other indication whatsoever of such an attack – there being no obviously military finds among the substantial assemblage of Roman period artefacts recovered from the interior and defences of the fort during the excavations.

What the composition of the group indicates is that this was very probably a military party (minus their weapons) rather than a hastily assembled group of defenders. Two questions addressed in this talk are, however, what was their identity as a group and what were the circumstances of their violent deaths and summary burial? The tentative possible answer to these questions implicates a third: What were they doing at Sutton Walls in the first place?