



THE BURIED CROWN

BY ALLY SHERRICK

SYNOPSIS

It's World War Two and Britain is on the brink of invasion. Londoner George has been sent to live in the countryside while his brother and guardian, Charlie, trains as a fighter pilot. But the war is closer than he thinks. An ancient burial ground nearby contains a priceless treasure, a magical Anglo-Saxon crown Hitler is desperate to possess. Alongside Kitty, the granddaughter of a Jewish archaeologist, George must find and protect the crown from the Nazi invaders before it's too late ...

WHAT THE PUBLISHER SAYS ...

'When I was young, I desperately wanted to be an archaeologist, digging up lost treasure - it seemed like a kind of magic ... and perhaps it is. The Buried Crown is set during the darkest hour of the Second World War, but its buried treasure holds the power of an Anglo-Saxon king, and hope for Britain itself. Bury yourself in this irresistible tale of gold, adventurous deeds and slimy villains: the brilliant Ally Sherrick tells a story of how the power of the past can rush to our rescue!' **BARRY CUNNINGHAM, CHICKEN HOUSE**

AUTHOR BACKGROUND

Ally was born and grew up in Surrey. She graduated with a BA in medieval history, English and French from the University of Newcastle in 1987 and, in 2011, with distinction from the Writing

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for Children MA course at the University of Winchester. Her debut children's novel, *Black Powder*, won the Historical Association's Young Quills Award, the North Somerset Teachers' Book Award and was shortlisted for eight others. She is married and lives with her husband and assorted garden wildlife in Farnham, Surrey.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

'The key inspiration for my story is a real event – the discovery of the great Anglo-Saxon Sutton Hoo ship burial in a Suffolk field during the summer of 1939, just before the outbreak of the Second World War.

Described at the time as the British equivalent of the famous Tutankhamun tomb discovery of Ancient Egypt, the burial is one of the richest ever found in northern Europe. Inside the ghostly imprint of a great wooden longship, 27 metres in length, the archaeologists who excavated the site found a unique collection of priceless treasures, believed to belong to a person of high standing, possibly the Anglo-Saxon king, Redwald of the East Angles (died around 624) – though no trace of a body was actually found. Anglo-Saxon records refer to Redwald as 'Bretwalda' or 'Britain-ruler' which suggests he may also have been a sort of early high king of Britain.

The Sutton Hoo treasures are now on public display in the British Museum in London and are regarded as one of the highlights of its collection.

I first learnt about the ship burial when I studied early medieval history at university. But it was when I visited the site – now in the care of the National Trust – over twenty years later that my imagination really caught fire.

The field of around eighteen grassy mounds, set on top of a ridge overlooking the estuary of the River Deben near the small town of Woodbridge in Suffolk, is both beautiful and mysterious. What intrigued me most though was the timing and significance of unearthing the long-lost treasure of an ancient English king on the eve of an event as cataclysmic and world-changing as the Second World War. I had also read a short story by the famous ghost story writer, M.R. James, 'A Warning to the Curious', about an ancient Anglo-Saxon crown that is reputed to protect the country from invasion. This set me thinking about what might happen if a young boy, exiled from his home



during the very darkest days of the conflict with Nazi Germany, makes a discovery, linked to the Sutton Hoo ship burial, which has the potential to influence the future course of the war.

My story is set in a real time and place and I have drawn on my own knowledge of the war – with a little help from my father who was an evacuee – and of the local area to bring it to life. But I’ve also taken a few liberties with local scenery and real personalities, together with the creation of imagined characters and events, in the interests of telling as exciting a story as possible.’ **ALLY SHERRICK**

THEMES

- Courage against the odds
- Friendship and loyalty
- Family and love
- Exile from home and family
- Bullying and prejudice
- Grief and acceptance of death
- Finding the treasure inside yourself
- The power of stories and legends

WRITING STYLE

The Buried Crown is written in the third person, past tense, and sticks closely to the perspective of main character, George Penny. The exception is the prologue, which is written from the perspective of Nazi officer Kurt Adler. The author’s ultimately straightforward but immersive storytelling style is typical of historical fiction, allowing her to weave in period details effortlessly while remaining emotionally engaged with the characters. **320 pages, age 9+**



PUPIL ACTIVITIES

1. *Beasts of Battle*

'With the Regenbogens' help, he saw through the layers of grime to what lay beneath ... A pile of gold coins in the remains of a giant purse, its lid studded with jewelled plaques showing men flanked by wolves and giant birds of prey.'
(Page 62)

Surviving Anglo-Saxon literature and art – including the Sutton Hoo ship burial treasures – reflect the importance of the Germanic warrior code in early English society. Ally has used the key elements of this code – its emphasis on loyalty, treasure-giving and winning honour in battle – as themes in *The Buried Crown* too. She has also incorporated the idea of the so-called 'Beasts of Battle' – the eagle, the wolf and the raven. In some poems, they are shown feasting on the dead after a battle, while in others they are used by the poet to foreshadow the slaughter to come. (The story of *Beowulf* is a good example.)

As a class, identify where each of these three creatures – either real or representations of – appears in *The Buried Crown*. Then, using a whiteboard, create a spidergram around each animal listing the sorts of qualities and characteristics they display in the story. For each one decide whether they are a force for good, bad or are perhaps more ambivalent in their meaning. Do their roles change as the story progresses? If so, how?

Note: The dragon also features in Anglo-Saxon poetry and art (including on many items in the Sutton Hoo treasure). It typically performs a 'treasure guardian' role and is not a 'beast of battle'. However, if students identify it, it can still be treated as part of this exercise.

2. *Runes, riddles and treasure guardians*

"And one thing we do know ... the Anglo-Saxons used runes on objects because they believed it gave them special powers. I think the person who made this crown – whoever they were – wanted to do the same." (Page 157)



The runic inscription on the crown in the story – the Kingdom Keeper – is based on the real runes, or letters, of the old Germanic alphabets used by the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings. As Ernst Regenbogen suggests, it is believed such inscriptions, which usually feature on swords, rings and other precious objects, may have been used as charms investing the object with magical, often protective properties.

Working in pairs, discuss a famous item of ‘treasure’ you have seen – either in real life or on television/in a film. Who might want to take it? And if you could, what sort of charm would you give it to protect it? What might the consequences be for anyone who tries to steal it? Have a go at translating your charm into real Anglo-Saxon runes (perhaps using an online runic alphabet ‘converter’). As an alternative, extended exercise, students could be invited to create their own piece of priceless treasure from recycled materials, inscribe it with a runic charm and then exhibit it in a class ‘museum’.

3. Far from home: evacuees and refugees

“The transports. I told you about them, remember? They offered Jewish children lucky enough to have their names put on the list the chance to escape and come to Britain ... I did not want to go – to leave them – but Mama insisted ...”
(Page 170)

Wars and conflicts force countless numbers of ordinary people to flee their homes and to travel many miles, often at great risk, in desperate search of safe refuge. The Second World War was no different, and the idea of exile and being parted from your loved ones is an important theme in *The Buried Crown*, with both George – an evacuee from London – and Kitty – a ‘Kindertransport’ refugee from Germany – having to adjust to living in a strange and unfamiliar environment, far from home.

As a class, explore the differences in meaning between the terms ‘evacuee’ and ‘refugee’. What are the similarities between the two? How do you think you would feel if you had to leave your friends and family behind and travel to a strange new place either as an evacuee or a refugee?



To explore this question in more detail, use books and the internet to research the real-life stories of an evacuee or a refugee from the Second World War. Alternatively, thinking about what happened to Kitty's granddad in the book, you might want to investigate the story of a so-called 'enemy alien' – a German, Austrian or Italian person living in Britain and interned in a camp or sent away overseas during the war. Make a scrap-book-style collage of your chosen person's experiences based on your research. Then, putting yourself in their shoes and using your imagination to fill in the gaps, write two accompanying diary entries: one about the moment when you had to leave your home and family – who and what did you miss? What did you have to leave behind? Were you frightened or excited – or both? The second entry should cover your arrival at your final destination. What do you see, hear, smell and taste? What sort of welcome do people give you? How do you feel – what are your hopes and fears about this new home?

4. Doing your bit

“It don't feel right leaving you, Georgie, but you understand, don't you? I've got to do my bit to try and stop old Adolf, or life won't be worth living.” (Page 23)

The novel opens not long after what is considered one of the lowest points of the Second World War for Britain, after the Allies had lost the battle for France and hundreds of thousands of troops had to be rescued from the beach at Dunkirk. But although the retreat was a significant defeat, the successful evacuation of so many soldiers and the efforts of the Royal Air Force pilots to hold the German Luftwaffe at bay during the 'Battle of Britain', paved the way for a new determination to stand up to Adolf Hitler and to do whatever was necessary to stop him from invading the country and winning the war.

Discuss as a class what examples there are in Ally's story of people 'doing their bit' for the war effort. (Examples might include scouts and guides collecting money for the 'Spitfire Fund', people volunteering for the Home Guard or as ARP wardens, as well as men like Charlie and the other pilots and soldiers joining the services to fight.) Are there any examples of people in the story trying to profit from the country being at war too? What do you think about this?



OR

Working in pairs, research a real-life example of someone who performed a heroic deed during the war. It might be someone in the services – an airman, a soldier, a sailor or a nurse – or who was a member of the Home Guard or an air-raid warden. Or it could be an ordinary person ‘doing their bit’, either in Britain or overseas.

Using that person’s story as an example, pretend that one of you is a radio reporter and the other is the hero or heroine who has agreed to be interviewed about what they did. Think up the likely questions the reporter would ask and the answers the hero/heroine might give. For example: Who are they? What did they do? Why did they do it? What happened to them afterwards? Act out the interview for the class. Use this as the starting point for writing your own story about an act of wartime bravery.

WRITING PROMPTS/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Cowardice and Courage

These two character traits feature strongly in the story and are often displayed by the same person at different stages. Do you think George becomes more courageous as the story progresses? Why? If you don’t agree, explain why not. What about Kitty, Raymond Scroggins, Spud and Hans Ritter?

What’s the bravest thing you’ve ever done? And – if you’re prepared to confess it – what’s the most cowardly? If you had your chance again, would you do things differently? Why – or why not?

2. Buried Treasure

What different types of ‘treasure’ are there in the story? What are the different motives people – or creatures – have for wanting a) to protect the treasure or, b) get hold of it?

At the end of the story, the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, suggests to George and Kitty that the crown



should be kept secret for the time being. Do you think he is right to do this? Give reasons for your answer. What lengths would you go to in order to protect your most precious possession – or someone you love?

3. Seeing ghosts

“... what if it was a ghost you saw too?” A finger of ice slid up George’s spine. Could she be right? No, it was daft even to think it.’ (Page 189)

Who do *you* think George sees beneath the tree at the burial site when he goes looking for Spud in the storm and why? What about when he goes back to bury the crown? What evidence is there in the story that Kitty might be right and that the ghost of the king might really exist? Do you believe in ghosts? Why – or why not?

4. What’s in a story?

“Legends may be stories, George, but there are always grains of truth buried within them – if you know where to look.”
(Page 157)

George and Kitty have quite different views from each other about stories at the start of the book. How do you know this? What does George think by the end? What might have made him change his mind? Do you agree with Kitty’s granddad that most stories have ‘grains of truth’ in them? Say why, or why not.

