



The Newsletter of the Sutton Hoo Society

SAXON

President: HRH The Duke of Edinburgh

No. 13 / 1990

NEW DISCOVERIES, NEW POSSIBILITIES by Jenny Glazebrook



*Top: Opening up Sector 1 by machine at the start of the 1990 season.
Bottom: Andrew Copp supervises the machine driver.*

Digging with a JCB may not be everyone's idea of careful excavation, but years of patient work and detailed analysis of the distribution of finds have enabled archaeologists at Sutton Hoo to take advantage of machines for the removal of turf and topsoil, secure in the knowledge that there will be no loss of valuable information (see **Bulletin 7**). This year, a JCB was used to open up the eastern arm of the excavation sample (Sector 1) which stretches across the monument from the burial mounds to the fields.

In fact, as our picture shows, a highly-skilled machine driver is capable of rather delicate work. After the turf has been scraped away, the topsoil — here a 19th C ploughsoil — is ploughed again with the teeth of the JCB bucket. Teams of experienced diggers then walk over the ground searching for archaeological finds, and these are all plotted on a map of the excavation. The last of the ploughsoil and all subsequent archaeological layers are moved by hand.

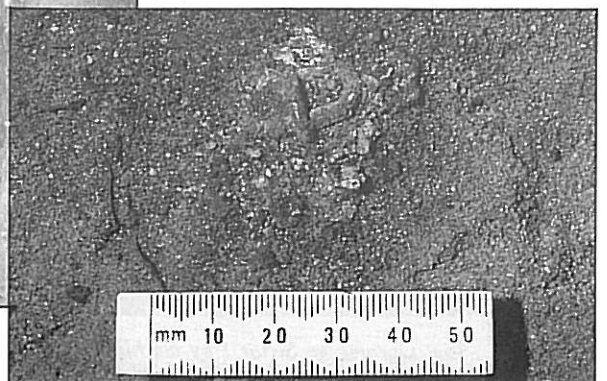


Above: Searching for finds after the ground has been 'ploughed' by machine.

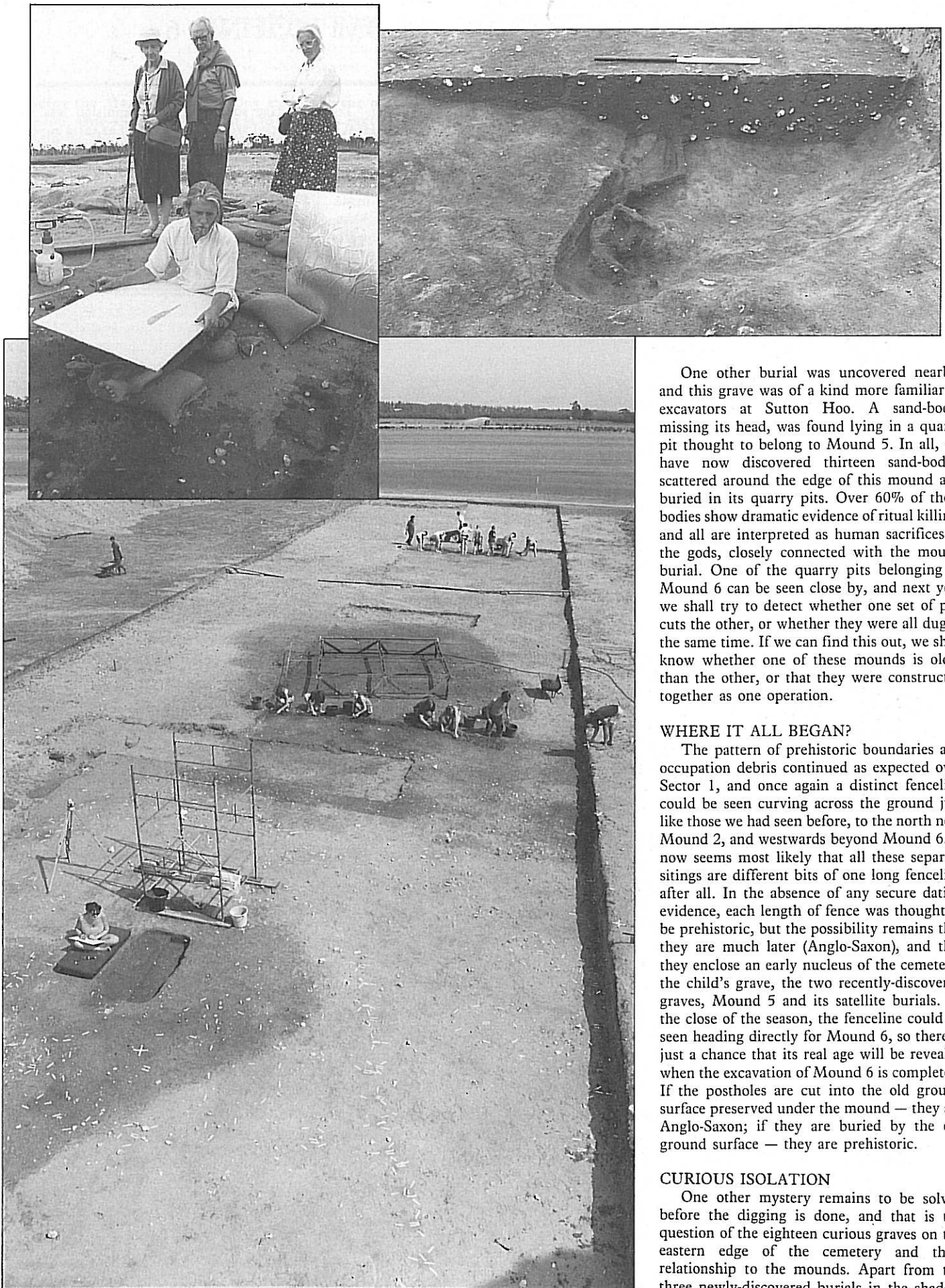


GRAVES WITHOUT MOUNDS

Much of Sector 1 remains to be examined next year, but some intriguing finds have already come to light in the area which was painstakingly cleaned and planned during the long hot summer of 1990. Two graves were discovered close to the child's grave excavated in 1987 (see **Saxon 7**). The graves lay side-by-side, and are unlike any others yet found at Sutton Hoo having grave goods but no mounds. In one a sand-body lay in a coffin, with a bronze pin, leather thong and glass bead near the shoulder, an iron object and an area of decayed leather (a purse?) near the hip. The other held the remains of a sand-body on a wooden 'tray', with two bronze buckles on a strip of leather and an iron object — possibly a knife in its sheath. The excavation of this grave was carried out under the watchful eye of a BBC camera, and may well feature in the next film about Sutton Hoo.



Above: Sand-body lying on the remains of a wooden 'tray'. Bottom right: One of two bronze buckles from the 'tray' burial. Top right: Amette Roe's careful excavation of the 'tray' burial has been filmed by BBC cameraman David Swan.



One other burial was uncovered nearby, and this grave was of a kind more familiar to excavators at Sutton Hoo. A sand-body, missing its head, was found lying in a quarry pit thought to belong to Mound 5. In all, we have now discovered thirteen sand-bodies scattered around the edge of this mound and buried in its quarry pits. Over 60% of these bodies show dramatic evidence of ritual killing, and all are interpreted as human sacrifices to the gods, closely connected with the mound burial. One of the quarry pits belonging to Mound 6 can be seen close by, and next year we shall try to detect whether one set of pits cuts the other, or whether they were all dug at the same time. If we can find this out, we shall know whether one of these mounds is older than the other, or that they were constructed together as one operation.

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN?

The pattern of prehistoric boundaries and occupation debris continued as expected over Sector 1, and once again a distinct fenceline could be seen curving across the ground just like those we had seen before, to the north near Mound 2, and westwards beyond Mound 6. It now seems most likely that all these separate sitings are different bits of one long fenceline after all. In the absence of any secure dating evidence, each length of fence was thought to be prehistoric, but the possibility remains that they are much later (Anglo-Saxon), and that they enclose an early nucleus of the cemetery: the child's grave, the two recently-discovered graves, Mound 5 and its satellite burials. At the close of the season, the fenceline could be seen heading directly for Mound 6, so there is just a chance that its real age will be revealed when the excavation of Mound 6 is completed. If the postholes are cut into the old ground surface preserved under the mound — they are Anglo-Saxon; if they are buried by the old ground surface — they are prehistoric.

CURIOUS ISOLATION

One other mystery remains to be solved before the digging is done, and that is the question of the eighteen curious graves on the eastern edge of the cemetery and their relationship to the mounds. Apart from the three newly-discovered burials in the shadow of Mounds 5 and 6, no other graves or Anglo-Saxon remains of any kind have yet been seen along the length of Sector 1. 1991 will provide our last chance to discover the reason for this distinct group of burials so far away from the main cemetery.

Top left: Justin Brown records the details of a quarry pit, in which a sand-body was found. He is watched by Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries. Top right: The headless body at the bottom of the quarry pit. Above: Work in progress on Sector 1 at the height of the season. Annette has begun to excavate one of the graves (left, foreground), and a line of white tags running up from the bottom of the picture marks the fence line.

RETRIEVING TEXTILE FROM MOUND 6

by Simon Dove

During the excavation of Mound 6 in September 1989 a fragment of folded textile was discovered attached to some pieces of thin copper alloy sheet. Martin Carver contacted the Department of Conservation at the British Museum for advice, and I visited the site on 19 September to lift the find and bring it to the Museum for treatment. The conditions on site and the condition of the object meant that some specialised techniques had to be used; these are described in this article.

The weather at the time was sunny with a warm, drying wind constantly blowing across the site. This caused any freshly excavated features or objects to dry out very quickly. Textile which had remained flexible during burial in a damp environment, would become brittle and split in these conditions. To prevent this, the new find was shaded and moistened with water at regular intervals.

Parts of the textile had been mineralised by absorbing copper minerals from the corroding metal fragments, and had assumed a green colouration. The darker green areas were completely mineralised and very brittle. Most of the fragment was lying flat with areas overlapping and it had several folds in it. At one end two folds protruded to 1cm above the general level of the textile and the crests of

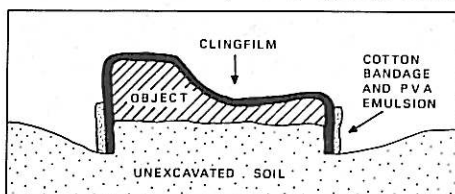
these had split and were crumbling. To prevent further deterioration some HMG Nitrocellulose adhesive was carefully applied along the fragile crests.

The overall size of the find was not known when I first heard about it, so I made provisions to retrieve an object of about 30cm across by 15cm deep. The length and breadth were first found by gently removing the surrounding sandy soil with fine paint brushes and small spatulas. An area of 10cm immediately around the object was excavated to the level of the textile and then extended down to reveal the depth of the find, which proved to be 2cm (photo). To clear the lowest point a further 1cm was excavated.

This left the textile and metal fragments on a pedestal of soil. To prevent this collapsing as the soil dried, it was consolidated with polyvinyl acetate (PVA) emulsion. A sheet of plastic 'clingfilm' was laid over the object and down around the soil plinth (diagram). Cotton

bandage soaked in PVA emulsion was then wrapped around the pedestal as extra support. The 'clingfilm' prevented any contamination of the textile by the PVA. Despite its fragility the textile was not directly consolidated with PVA because it is hoped that future laboratory analysis will not only identify the fibres and the weave but also reveal its original colouring. Fibre identification is carried out by examination using a scanning electron microscope, and the presence of consolidants gives an unclear image.

Once the PVA emulsion had set, the soil pedestal was cut through underneath with a large spatula and the block lifted on to a tray made of a sheet of dental wax using a fish slice. This in turn was put into a plastic box and covered with clingfilm. Loose soil was gently added around the block as a final packing material. It now awaits delivery to the British Museum where the scientific investigation will be carried out.



Simon Dove is the Senior Conservator for the Metals Section in the Department of Conservation at the British Museum.



Main picture: Andrew Copp watches as Simon Dove carefully examines the find in the Mound 6 robber trench. Inset top: Fragment of textile in situ. Inset bottom: Detailed view of textile remains adhering to metal fragments from Mound 6, showing the weave of the material.

WHEN THE DIGGING HAS TO STOP

by Mike Weaver

During the Members' Open Day Prof. Carver outlined his ideas for the site once excavation is complete at the end of the 1991 Season. One aspect of his plan is to partially reconstruct the excavated mounds to show the process of mound building; one mound would be shown as recently completed, and this would form part of an experiment to observe the progress of the mound — its weathering and erosion, and its colonisation by plants. The plans provoked lively discussion on the site tour, and afterwards during lunch. Here, Mike Weaver, the first Hon. Sec. of the Society, gives his personal response to Martin Carver's ideas for the future of the site.



Sutton Hoo . . . a series of low grassy mounds.

At the annual open meeting for members of the Sutton Hoo Society in September, Martin Carver effectively developed the public debate on the future of the site when the current excavations end in 1991. Upon the decisions made next Autumn the very existence of our Society depends.

At present the cemetery resembles a battlefield, c.1915, the remnants of the 1987 storm damage to Top Hat Wood compounding the effect. Patently a great deal of restoration must take place; considerable thought will need to be given to the function of the sculpture in sand and turf that will be created by the earth movers.

There can be no doubt that visitors will continue to pour onto site in the years ahead, albeit in slowly decreasing numbers, but certainly in sufficient number to justify our continued existence and enthusiasm as a Society. The old enemies, rabbits, bracken and vandals will continue to harass Sutton Hoo. A structured management programme post-Carver is necessary both to reflect the achievements of the last ten years and to preserve the site for the next wave of archaeologists. There can be no going back to the dark age of the 1970s when the site was systematically attacked, culminating in the assault on Mound 11 which so affronted the academic world. I believe that the Sutton Hoo Society has a central role to play in the management programme which will preserve the site and present it to the discerning visitor.

A number of options present themselves to the decision makers. The site could, quite simply be returned to its 1983 status and in the years ahead the guides will present to their audiences, as once they did, a series of low grassy mounds each with an accompanying story. A second option would be a restoration to 1983 status with the addition of major work to Mound 1, creating a boat outline in a solid substance, perhaps concrete. The advantages

of such a suggestion are obvious; it would be a potent attraction for visitors and a marvellous educational aid. The disadvantages are equally apparent: the sandy mound would need careful shoring-up and constant monitoring; the 'ship' would require regular cleaning and maintenance; the costs of construction could be formidable.

It would not be unnatural for the current excavation team to wish to celebrate their own triumphs-in-the-sand and a number of ingenious suggestions have been made to achieve this end. The rebuilding on Mounds 2, 5, 6 and 7 would be done to show the stages by which a Saxon barrow was constructed. Samples of the interventions of modern man might be preserved, perhaps even including the trim robber trenches into Mounds 6 and 7. Would not the capricious nature of Suffolk sand rebel against any attempt at such sophisticated treatment?

It is my view that there is only one way to preserve the cemetery and the names of those who have investigated it. We must turn back the clock to 1983. Restore Mound 2 and the hint of Mound 5; recarpet Mounds 6 and 7. I offer one compromise. Give consideration to laying open the quarry ditch around Mound 2 and reform the identified causeways. Oh, and would it be possible to create that memory of the field bank that points so significantly to the missing portion of Mound 1?

The Sutton Hoo site, uncluttered, emits an air of mystery and fascination. Visitors should be able, once again, to stand beneath the ash tree at the entrance and look at the horizon of mounds, the graves of our forefathers, with no visible mark of twentieth century man. Beneath the trees of Top Hat Wood, and out of range of toppling timber, a more solid display hut could outline the story of Sutton Hoo in our own century and our attempts to probe and understand it: Basil Brown in 1938; Brown and Phillips and the great discovery;

Bruce-Mitford and the first post-war excavation; Martin Carver and the team as the century closed. The sandmen could make a final move and lie near the display hut.

It may well be that my feelings on this matter are simply a sentimental response to the memory of those heady first years when we guides presented an uncut site to those enthusiastic crowds. I think we can do it again and should do it again. Now there will be more to tell and more to see; an enhanced exhibition will reflect recent research. And remember, a reconstituted Mound 2 will be no less a tribute to Martin and his team than Mound 1 is to Basil Brown and those who followed him. Who knows what we can achieve in the years ahead when the solid foundations have been laid of a management programme whose first priority is to guard and protect the site. Certainly, no one will argue with the concept that firstly we must restore peace and dignity to the prime cemetery of our royal Saxon ancestors.

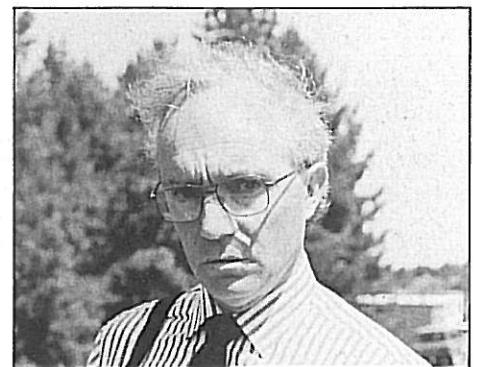


Photo: M.A. Mitchels.

Mike Weaver is Head of the History Department at Woodbridge School. He has been presenting Sutton Hoo to the public since 1975 and was the first Hon. Secretary at the Sutton Hoo Society.



A DREAM COME TRUE
by Karissa Ansell-Bell

It all began when I was still just 'knee-high to a grasshopper'. With a TV documentary on the 1939 discovery of the Sutton Hoo ship burial and my first 'eye-opening' trip to England and Europe with my family in 1973, an insatiable interest in history and archaeology (especially of medieval England) was born.

Much later, after several trips back to England, a few small excavations in my home state of Oregon, one bizarre and eventful summer excavating on a remote tropical

Pacific island for the University of Oregon, and finally, the completion of BA degrees in history and anthropology, my childhood dream of actually visiting one of the first sites I'd ever heard of came true. Sutton Hoo by this time was a legend in its own time, so hearing that there would be space for me in one of their training excavations in the summer of 1989 seemed almost too good to really be true.

Prior to actually arriving at Sutton Hoo, the dig itself was the only aspect of the site I had heard of, so I had no idea what the people working there would be like. Much to my relief, they were pleasant folks. Feeling at home and blending in turned out to be an easier task than I had originally imagined. It was quite the international group. There were archaeologists and students from Japan, Italy, USSR, Canada and of course the USA, working alongside those from Scotland and England. Many of us were in the same boat; a long way from home, but with similar interests in the past resulting in our individual pilgrimages to Sutton Hoo.

It all turned out to be a lot of fun AND challenging. Among other things I learned about the effects of acidic soil on organic remains — ie the sandmen — which alone was a pretty cool discovery! Sutton Hoo was unlike any other type of site I'd worked on before. In fact, the whole experience was different: the finds, the number of archaeologists, the use of computers on site, down to living in tents, and last but definitely NOT least . . . Elsan Duty!

It turned out that Sutton Hoo was such a positive influence, it led me to continue my education as a graduate student of Medieval Archaeology at York University, and even to return again this summer, (this time with my husband) to the tents of Sutton Hoo as part of my course.

For an enlightening and rewarding archaeological experience, you'll find it at Sutton Hoo!!

Karissa was one of two students who received scholarships from the Society during the 1990 excavation season.

SOCIETY REPORTS

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 1990 by Robert Simper

This long hot summer has seen the Sutton Hoo Society arriving at a crossroads about its future. The present excavation will end next summer and the suggestion is that the Society should continue playing a leading role in helping to preserve and present the Site as a focal point for future interest in Early English History. A fine sentiment, but how is this to be achieved?

When there is no longer an excavation at the site how is the public interest to be catered for? Obviously access to the site is still needed, and a display. Should the display centre be on the site? There is already the hut used for display purposes, but its useful life is limited and we don't have the money to replace it. It might also be difficult to get planning permission for a permanent building. The alternative is to find another building close by, within easy reach of the site. So far the Tide Mill Granary is the only building which might be available. However the rent asked by the owners makes this out of our reach.

Obviously it is important to keep the guided tours going to help raise money to help the site in the future, bearing in mind that the Society is not in the position to borrow money. The main income for the future would come from guided tours, sales of books etc and sponsorship. The chances of the Society getting sponsorship for a display centre are quite hopeful.

The future of the site is most important. Prof. Martin Carver has prepared a Management Plan for the display of the site after 1992. This calls for the active involvement of the Sutton Hoo Society in helping to safeguard the site. We are witnessing an important chapter in the history of Sutton Hoo with the current Research Project but the story is not over yet. Further research will continue into this fascinating subject.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT by Andrew Lovejoy

Membership of the Sutton Hoo Society remains buoyant; 51 new members have joined in 1990. The total membership of the Society is 345 of which 62 are Life Members and a number are overseas members. **Saxon** is distributed nationwide as far as Cornwall, Wales and Scotland, and reaches the USA and Canada in some numbers, as well as South Africa and Australia. It is heartening to see so many members dating from the early days of the Society.

One way in which existing members can further the future of the Society is to encourage friends to visit the site during the summer season and then get them to join the Society. There are few excavations which produce a "package" like ours — newsletter, free entry and outings — for their Friends. Plans are afoot to give the Society a future beyond 1992 when the digging finishes. It would be grand if we could face the Society's changes at the end of the active digging in 1991 with a large body of interested members.



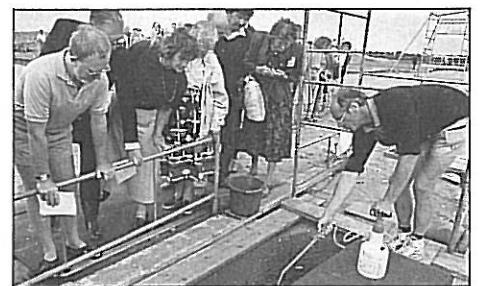
Visitors to Sutton Hoo in 1990.

SECRETARY'S REPORT by Larry Gatter

The weekend visitor season has been very successful this year despite there being no TV Chronicle programme to give it the boost we had in 1989. It is clear from our statistics that by the end of the August Bank Holiday almost exactly the same number of adults and children aged over 10 years attended this year, and purchased the same value of books and souvenirs — in fact we not only sold all the guide books, but will have to arrange another print run before next season. Although we were concerned early in the year that we would do less well in 1990, our aggressive publicity campaign to cover the whole of East Anglia with our pamphlets, and to engage the full support of the tourist organisations, has clearly paid off. We have certainly had very few complaints from visitors, and they have co-operated well over car-parking.

Although the weekend takings have remained high, there have been very few school visits this year, which is probably the result of their need to conserve funds. We look forward to an improvement in 1991.

Once again, many thanks to our guides and helpers, particularly to those who started this season, or returned from afar to help. Once again, Martin Carver has expressed tremendous gratitude to us all for the standards we are achieving.



Martin Carver and Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries.

SOCIETY EVENTS

OPEN DAY

We began our Open Day a little earlier this year to allow for more time for the site tour. As ever this provided Members with more fascinating insights into the history of the people who created the mounds at Sutton Hoo, as well as those who have visited the site in the past, both as excavators and as passing travellers leaving their litter behind! About 50 members were guided round the site by Martin Carver to view the excavations, and also to ponder upon and discuss the current proposals for the future presentation of the site — not all agreed with the suggestions! Once again we must thank Rosemary Halliday for an excellent lunch, and also those members of the Project Team who showed Society Members their work — Frances Lee working with bone material from the graves, and Gigi Signorelli for putting out examples of plans and drawings in the drawing office.

SOCIETY VISIT TO SNAPE

On August 17th a small group of members visited the excavations at Snape. After we had seen the well illustrated on-site display,

William Filmer-Sankey kindly gave a guided tour of the excavations which this year were on the opposite side of the Aldeburgh road.

The small mound in the corner of the field had been cleared of undergrowth and proved to look very similar to those at Sutton Hoo. Trenches had been dug to find the extent of the cemetery and further mapping of the site was in progress. This site is cropped every year before excavation which keeps it safe from robbers, but because of erosion on this sandy soil the cultivations are gradually going deeper and the top of inhumations are being destroyed. William Filmer-Sankey firmly believes that this site should be excavated quickly so that no more are lost.

Thanks must go to William Filmer-Sankey for giving up his time to give us an inspiring talk and to Clare Foss for organizing the evening.

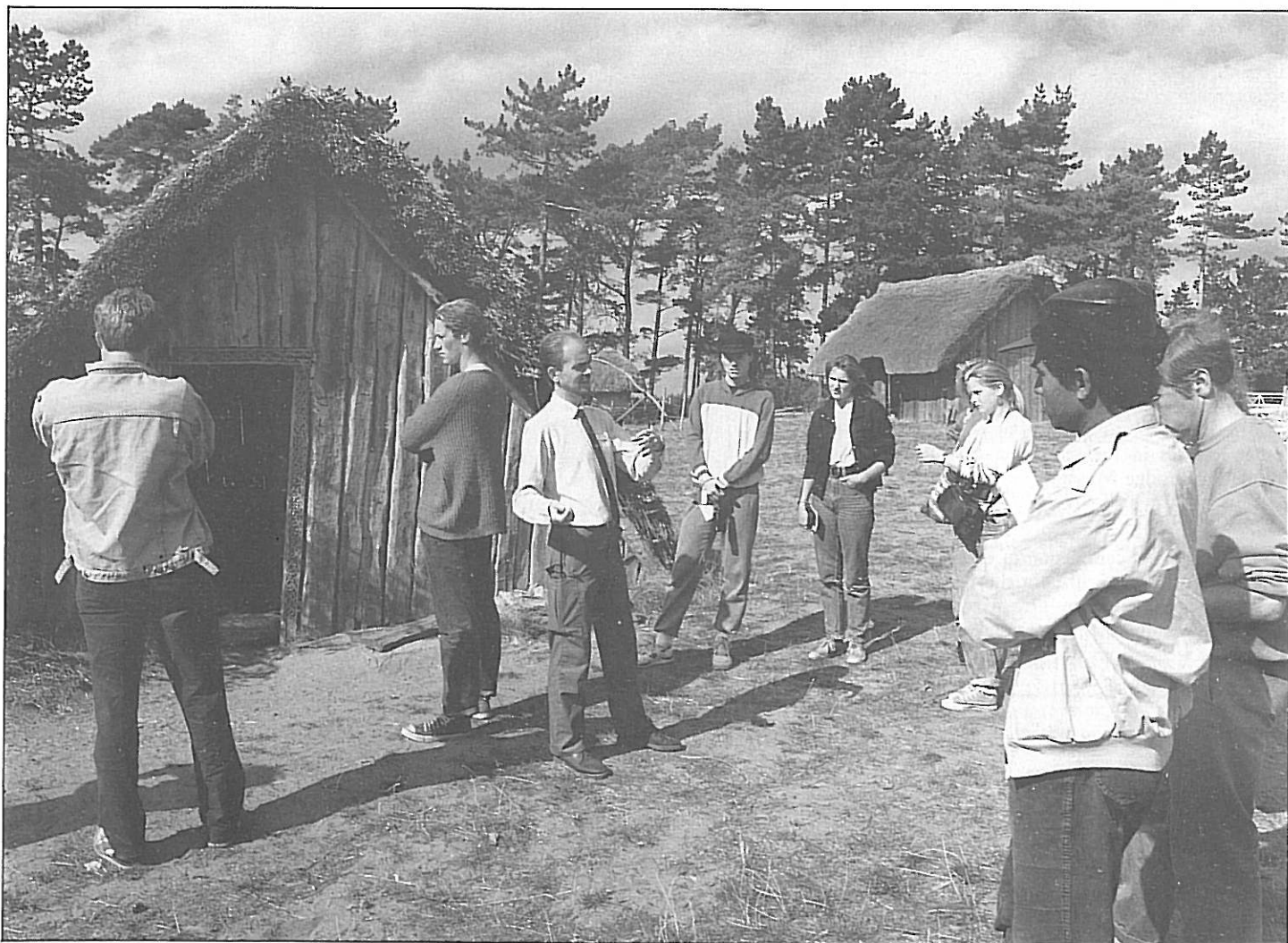
WEST STOW VISIT

Like the visit to the Snape dig earlier in the summer the outing to the West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village on October 7 was very poorly attended. Many members said they had already been there, but the guided tour by William

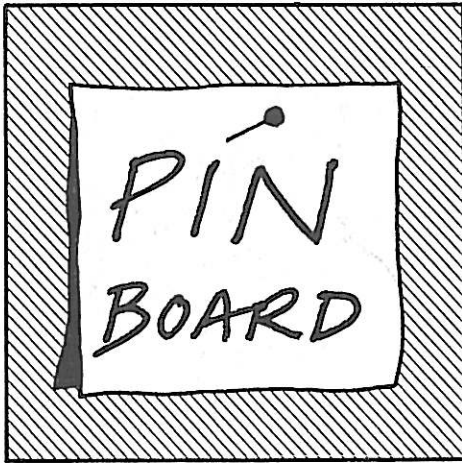
Wall was well worth the cost of the petrol for another trip and enduring the cold Breckland wind.

The West Stow experiment of building houses and a hall on the site of the Anglo-Saxon village has greatly increased our knowledge of the Dark Age people who lived in the centuries before Sutton Hoo.

In 1972 when the first house was reconstructed by students, they used only the simple hand tools which were available to the early Saxon people. The students deliberately used very crude building techniques because it was thought that the early medieval people were poor craftsmen. That first house, now on the verge of collapsing was a very poor structure, and it was a wrong assumption that a people capable of building a sophisticated craft like the Sutton Hoo ship could not put up a perfectly habitable wooden house. Each subsequent house has been constructed with a different technique to see which works the best. One belief that has been disproved at West Stow is that a hole was needed in the roof to let smoke out from the fire. When these houses are lived in during the summer it is found that the smoke will make its own way out through the thatch.



Reconstructed Anglo-Saxon houses at West Stow.



DIARY

SUTTON HOO SOCIETY

The next **Annual General Meeting** will be held on **Friday 1st February 1991** at **7.30pm**, in the Lecture Theatre at **Woodbridge School**.

COMMITTEE NOMINATIONS

Nominations for new Committee members should be sent to the Chairman of the Sutton Hoo Society (address below). Nominees should be members, willing to stand for election, and able to attend three or four meetings a year.

SPRING LECTURE

Dr CATHERINE HILLS of Cambridge University will give an illustrated talk about Archaeology and Television, based on her experiences as presenter for the new Channel 4 series 'Down to Earth'. The lecture has been arranged for Society Members and friends, and will be held in **St John's Hall, Woodbridge**, at **7.30pm** on **Wednesday 6 March 1991**.

WOODBRIDGE MUSEUM's programme of lectures includes 'Coins and Spoil... 12 Years of Toil' by Mrs VALERIE FENWICK, who has been excavating the remains of an Anglo-Saxon Settlement at Burrow Hill, Butley. This lecture will take place in the Hall at **Abbey School, Woodbridge**, on **Friday 8th March 1991** at **7.45pm**. Further details of other lectures in the series can be obtained from Woodbridge Museum.

EXCAVATION SEASON

1991 will see the completion of excavation at Sutton Hoo. There will be a short season of fieldwork at Easter from 17th March to 5th April, followed by the main season which will run for 13 weeks from 7th July to 4th October.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Project Team would like to pass on their warmest thanks to the Society for their valuable support during the 1990 season. This year the Society provided two scholarships for overseas graduates attending the Training Excavation, financed three new exhibition boards, and covered the cost of a battery powered back-up system for the computer.

We would also like to thank all the guides and helpers who have worked so hard to look after the public during the 1990 season. We know from many visitors' comments just how much the tours are appreciated, and the efforts of all those involved in providing the service do not go unnoticed.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Jaik Campbell (16), a pupil at Woodbridge School, has won a Royal Historical Society prize in conjunction with the Young Historian Scheme, for his GCSE coursework on Sutton Hoo. The value of the award is £300, and Lord Briggs will be making the presentations at the British Museum in November. All fifth formers at Woodbridge School pay a study-visit to the site and carry out exercises based on current excavations, the 1939 story and earlier documentary evidence. Study packs may be obtained from M A Weaver at Woodbridge School, but please enclose £2.00 for photocopying and postage.

NEW ARRIVAL: many congratulations to Nigel and Gay MacBeth on the arrival of their first child, a daughter. Elspeth was born on 25th May, and will no doubt be much-photographed!

OVERSEAS MEMBERS... could we ask you to pay subscriptions by **international money order** please? Substantial charges are involved in processing cheques, but an international money order ensures that the Society gains maximum benefit from your contribution.

YOUR LETTERS... we would like to hear your views on **Saxon** and the Society and we are particularly interested in your ideas and suggestions for future articles. Letters should be addressed to the Editor, Sutton Hoo Society (address below).

SALES

BULLETIN No 8 DUE OUT APRIL 1991... Interim report on the 1990 excavation season to be included. You can ensure you receive each new edition by joining the **Bulletin** mailing list. For details, contact Jenny Glazebrook at the site office (address below).

SUTTON HOO SLIDE PACKS

Slides of the treasures and current excavations are available in packs of 6, 12 and 24. These popular packs are selling fast — order yours now! Details and order forms available from the Research Project.



Voluntary help from the Venture Scouts. Andrew, Kathleen, Judith and Jessica from the 1st Bradfield Group (Essex) undertake some routine maintenance on the CEGB hut over the Easter break.

Contact Addresses:

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