

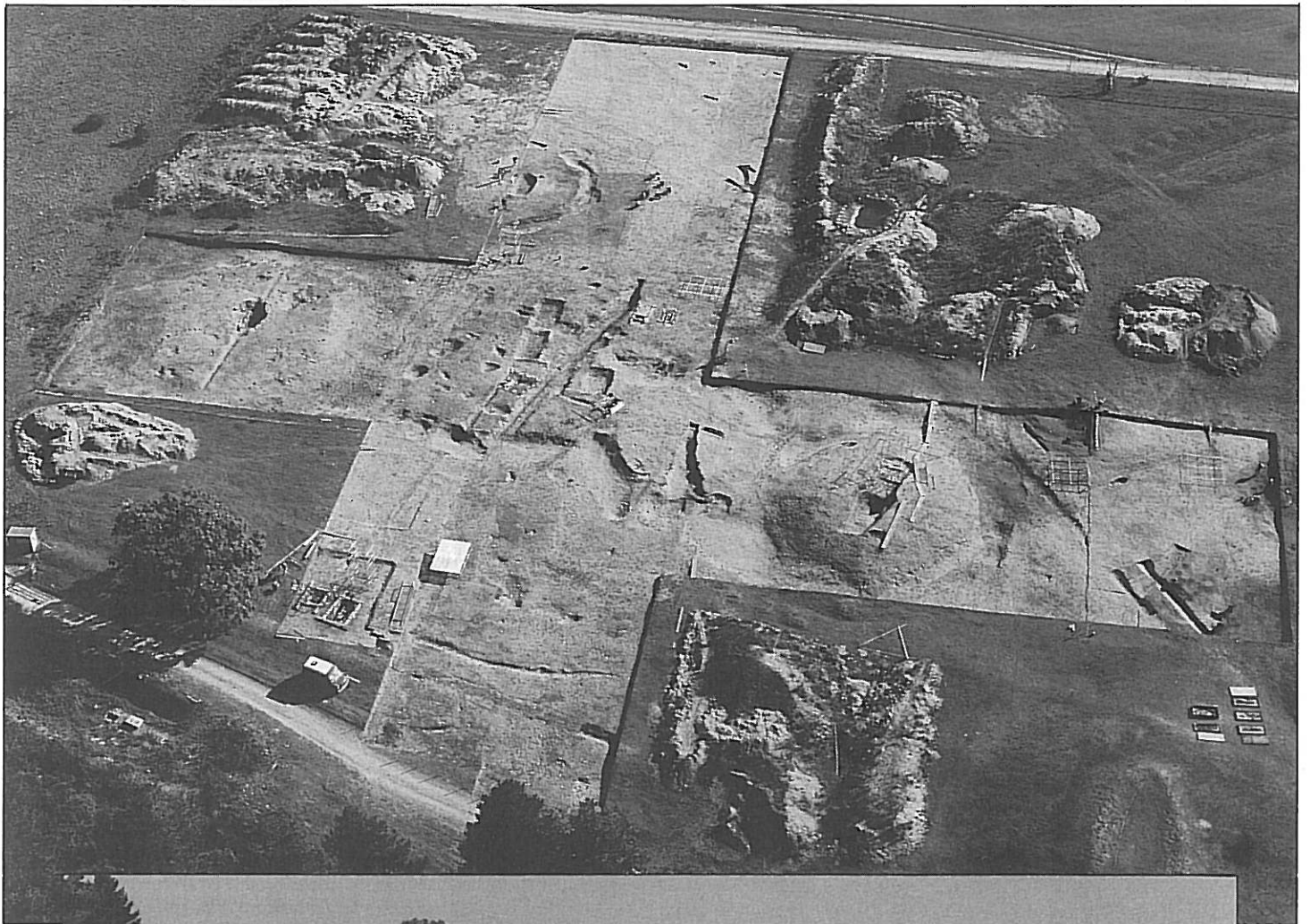


The Newsletter of the Sutton Hoo Society

SAXON

President: HRH The Duke of Edinburgh

No. 15 / 1991



Aerial shot of the completed excavation sample, September 1991. The Mound 17 graves can be seen surrounded by planks, close to the scaffolding tower (bottom left). Inset, part of the 1991 excavation team.

EIGHT YEARS 'IN SERVICE'

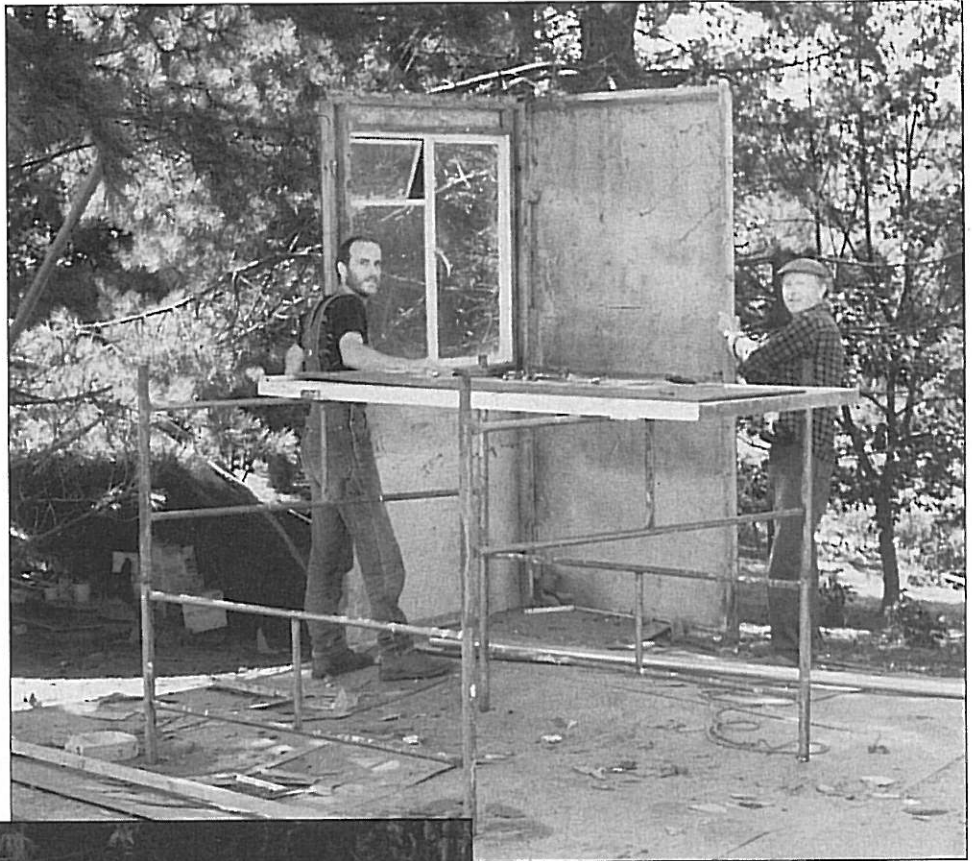
With October came the end of an era at Sutton Hoo. pumps and engines died, tools ceased to clatter, an army of marching feet was no more and peace once again had settled on the tufted grass of this Anglo-Saxon cemetery.

Since 1983, archaeologists had engaged in intensive annual excavations, the purpose and extent of which have been reported in detail in previous editions of this Newsletter.

The Project has been actively supported throughout by the Sutton Hoo Society by way of financial contributions, provision of guides and presentation of the site to visitors. At the heart of the latter has been Peter Berry, a former Committee Member who since 1984 has clocked up some 5000 hours and during the early days of the project was responsible for site management.

Peter had his initiation doing a few weeks trowelling to get the 'feel of the place' as it were. He recalls turning up at the site at 7.30 am on the first morning, as instructed by Birmingham University, only to be met by a scantily clad Andrew Copp who suggested he should go away and return at a more reasonable hour.

When later a problem arose regarding how best to protect 'Horace' (the first Sandman) from the elements, Peter offered his services only to be told he didn't understand the nature of the task. Undaunted by this rebuff he offered his



*Above: Peter Berry and Luka demolishing a landmark — the British Museum Hut.
Left: The remains of the hut are transformed into a protective cover for Mound 7.*

services again a few days later when obviously there was some urgency to solve the problem. As no-one had yet come up with a solution he was allowed to 'have a go' and his creation was the forerunner of numerous inventions and gadgets. These included 3 free-standing sieves, 3 large and 3 hand-held irrigation rainers with dual mains and pumped water supply, a wet-

sieve and a wash-house with hot shower and dual water supply.

To provide a ferry access to the site, he boarded up and infilled with shingle approximately 100 metres of the ferry hard at Woodbridge, erected a beach landing stage and bridge at Sutton and established and sign-posted a footpath from the staging to the site.

In the early days Peter spent hundreds of hours mowing — transforming a bracken terrain into the site we know to-day.

Other tasks undertaken over the years included provision of ramp, counter and shelves for the ticket hut, display boxes for the Sandmen replicas; suspension cradles and covers for graves; 150 metres of wooden pathway for wheelbarrows; wooden revetment and 10 x 3 metre lid for Mound 2; maintenance and repair of site equipment; construction of 2 Cesspits; laying 300 metres of 11" water main; designing and erecting polyspan; weekend supervision of Venture Scouts; setting up kitchen in C.E.G.B. hut including water supply and drainage; daily deliveries of milk and bread; occasional catering including special lunches, barbecues and Xmas parties; supply of Portakabins, furniture, toilets, utensils and equipment 'borrowed' from local establishments with only a few minor protestations from donors; installing lighting in buildings, shower and toilet; preparations for the visit of H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh and securing staff accommodation at the Fruit Farm and subsequently carrying out repairs and alterations there.

When asked to describe his eight years at the site, Peter said four words would suffice — challenging, enjoyable, interesting and rewarding. He added that he had met a host of splendid people, made many friends and last but not least had learnt to say 'hello' and 'don't' in about seven different languages.

A MOMENTOUS SEASON

by Martin Carver

The 1991 field season — five months of feverish activity — has brought to light a wealth of discoveries and new understanding of the history of the extraordinary archaeological site of Sutton Hoo.

New aristocratic burials were explored in Mounds 7, 14 and 17: a new cremation, a female buried in a chamber and a young man buried with his horse. More human sacrifices were found, both around Mound 5 and on the edge of the cemetery inland, where they apparently surrounded a tree. The Neolithic/early Bronze Age settlement, Sutton Hoo's prehistoric ancestor, became more comprehensible, with the excavation of the system of land division and the discovery of a Beaker period house, 4,000 years old.

A HORSE AND HIS BOY — THE SUTTON HOO PRINCE

Mound 17 was a mound so eroded as to be scarcely visible on the west side of the 'Hoo' overlooking the river. Beneath it lay two large graves, backfilled with yellow sand, so freshly defined that at first they were thought to be yet more robber trenches. But examination in August and September revealed the reality — both were intact; the first intact contents of a burial mound to be encountered since the ship burial under Mound 1.

In the more northerly grave, a metre down, lay the skeleton of a small horse, little more than 10-11 hands. The form of the animal was well preserved. Not only were the bones (unusually for Sutton Hoo) well-preserved, but the acid sand had captured the stained outline of the body — the belly, the neck and the withers. No bridle, halter or saddle accompanied the horse, but his owner was not far away.

The southern grave was an oval 3½m long and splendidly furnished. A timber coffin 2½m long contained the body of a young man about 5'6" tall, lying beside his sword. Outside the coffin stood a bucket, a cauldron containing a small ceramic pot, and what appears to have been a cloth haversack containing 5 ribs of meat and a bronze drinking bowl. This young hero was also provided with a spear and shield, and at the west end was a heap of leather, bronze fittings and iron-work, which has yet to be disentangled.

Not the least exciting part of this discovery has been the attempt to analyse and read the full sequence of funeral rites which took place at the time of burial. Although this analysis is far from complete, one can already see that the grave was furnished first, the shield and spear being laid on the floor of the chamber, followed by the cooking equipment and provisions. The coffin was then lowered in, apart from a comb, remembered at the last moment and thrown into the grave where it hit the coffin and slid down, upended, beside it. Such an action, redolent of the lifelong anxiety of an affectionate parent, brings closer to our own lives the curious behaviour of the early Anglian aristocracy.

The most inland of the mounds, Mound 14, contained a small wooden chamber constructed of small timbers set vertically. In the centre of the chamber, leaving the faintest impression, had been set a rectangular coffin, which was presumably surrounded by grave goods. How-



The body lay in a wooden coffin, beside an iron sword. Outside, the iron bucket and a bronze cauldron containing a pot are just emerging from the sand.

ever, as so often at this vulnerable site, the burial had been thoroughly looted in the 19th century or earlier. The looters had, as was customary, cut a rectangular trench through the mound to locate the burial, after which they expanded east, north, south and west to the edges of the chamber taking everything that caught their eyes. However there is some reason to suppose that on this occasion our tomb-robbers were surprised by a sudden thunderstorm. A thick layer of sandy silt washed into the hole, and a layer of trampled mud was found from which we recovered more than 100 scraps of broken



finds. Preliminary inspection suggests that there were delicate silver and bronze ornaments, and that we have here encountered, for the first time, a Sutton Hoo woman.

MOUND 7

The prodigious labour of emptying the giant robber trench through Mound 7 was finally completed in late September. As in Mound 6, the 19th century excavators had cut themselves a trench with a barrow-run at one end for the labourers to take out the spoil, and steps at the other where the gentleman antiquary emptied the chamber of spoils of another kind. We know very little about what was found, so thorough were their explorations. But the mound had contained a cremation, since cremated bone formed no part of their cavalier researches and was left in a little domed heap at the bottom, apparently emptied from a bowl. Subsequently, the north side of the excavation caved in and it was then partially backfilled and abandoned.

Who these pillagers were and what happened to their finds is something we would dearly like to discover, a question that is not beyond our conjecture.

THE SACRIFICIAL BURIALS AND THE RITUAL TREE

More satellite burials were discovered around Mound 5, including one nearby but actually in a Mound 6 quarry pit, where there was also a cow buried. Apart from this group, which seems to be human (or animal) sacrifices made at intervals around the highly important Mound 5, the other burials have all been found to lie together at the eastern extremity of the site. What they are doing there remains uncertain, but the central feature they surround is a pit of the type generally thought on this site to have contained a tree. Could these have been sacrificial too, made on, beside or even for, a tree?

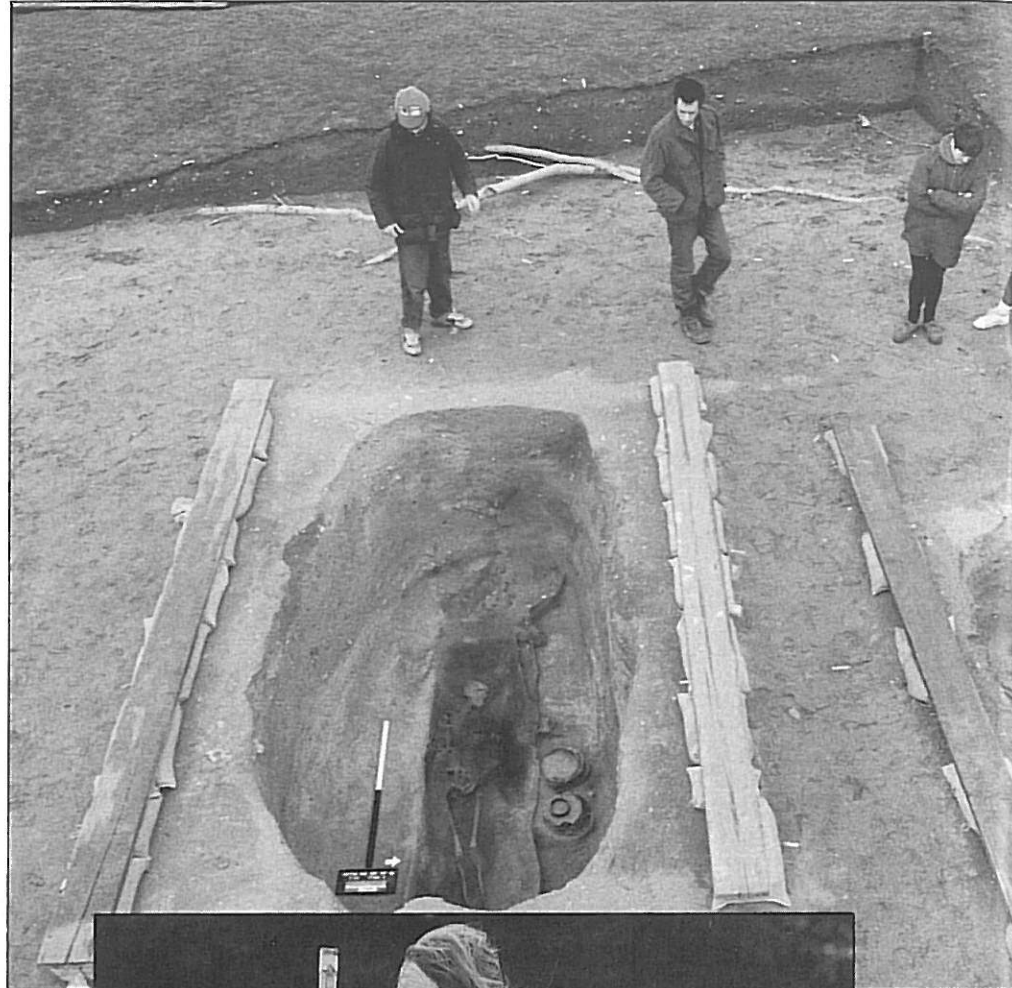
THE ANGLO-SAXONS AT SUTTON HOO

It is unlikely that we can ever know such things with certainty, but the large sample of the Sutton Hoo cemetery now exposed gives confidence in its overall interpretation. The cemetery is first exploited by a rich family in the late 6th or early 7th century (Mound 17), a family which by the year 600 or so has aspirations to kingship and the control of life, death and land. Their politics is the politics of autonomy and enterprise, and their ideology is shared with Scandinavia whose burial custom of cremation under mounds they embrace (Mounds 3, 4, 6, 7). The founder of this new power probably lay under Mound 5, a person at whose memorial human sacrifices continued to be offered. The political drama reached its climax with the deaths of the persons buried in Mound 2 and Mound 1, which were celebrated with ship-burial and a new extravagance.

Such extravagance was meant to be spectacular in its day, the spectacle which unites a new nation. It is also defiant, a statement of resistance against the increasing power of the Christian empire which was shortly to change the character of England for ever.

A BEAKER HOUSE

The earlier site at Sutton Hoo, a settlement occupied about 2,000BC, is no less fascinating than the later. This year we established that the field boundaries which divide up the Sandlings in this area were palisade fences, imposed as a single system in the early Bronze age. This is the first parcelling of land, an event of enormous



Annette Roe.



Above: The contents of the grave were painstakingly revealed by Annette.

Left: Members of staff viewing the graves of the prince and his horse.



Manyee, Fleur and Hazel from the British Museum Conservation Lab. The finds were protected with cling-film, and then plaster-of-paris bandages were applied to consolidate each item.

social and economic significance for the history of this island. Also discovered were ritual pits of the Neolithic period in which small pots were buried, and a structure of the 'Beaker' period. The 'beaker' is a small drinking vessel which is found buried with individuals under mounds in the years 2,500-2,000 BC. The 'beaker' spread all over Europe and up to the Orkneys but little is known about the ideas behind the practice. The houses of the Beaker people are very rare in England, hard to identify and hard to reconstruct. The Sutton Hoo structure was carpeted with Beaker pottery, including five urns, and was made more visible by having been burnt down. The excavation of the blackened post-holes is a treat which awaits us next year.

THE SUTTON HOO TEAM

In the course of a career there come rare periods when a group of colleagues, deliberately or fortuitously assembled, are set a challenge and confront it together in a spirit of co-operation and friendship. Such an occasion, the high point in any professional life, was our good fortune and privilege this summer.

The core team was Martin Carver (director), Madeleine Hummler (deputy and training director), Jenny Glazebrook (administrator), Andy Copp (supervisor), Nigel MacBeth (photographer), and Linda Peacock (finds supervisor). Justin Brown assisted by Gigi Signorelli mapped the whole of Interventions 50 and 55, a third of a hectare, supervising volunteer excavators from all over the world. Annette Roe supervised INT 48 and excavated the Prince; Kent Burson and Stephen Timms excavated his horse, Graham Bruce excavated Mound 14; Angela Evans, assisted by Helen Geake, excavated the Mound 7 robber trench and burial chamber. We were fortunate in having the skills of many others, whose contribution was not less for being short-term or unglamorous.

We owe a special debt to other friends whose presence and ingenuity puts new life into tired diggers — Roy and Faith Jerromes and above all the selfless and tireless Peter Berry, long the friend and often the inspiration of the project team.

THE FUTURE

The end of the main programme of fieldwork is not the end of Sutton Hoo. I, personally, shall not abandon it to another generation of looters and vandals, but will work for its protection and its presentation, to allow it to live on as a priceless part of England's Heritage. My own University, the University of York, intends to continue work here annually on a small scale, fine-tuning our results and working with the Suffolk Archaeological Unit to improve our knowledge of the extent and the character of the monument. Sutton Hoo's landowners are friendly towards our objective, and should remain so provided we in turn respect their amenity and privacy.

The future of Sutton Hoo could be secure and properly valued if we all work for it together; the landowners, English Heritage, the local authorities, and the academics. I hope so, because I believe it really matters.

In this the Sutton Hoo Society also has, I believe, an important future. Visitors will still want to come, and we must still control their access carefully, for the safety of all involved. The Society's support is, and will remain, vital, particularly playing the role of host and guides as they have done this summer and in the past, come rain or shine, for the great enjoyment and fascination of very many people.



A TALE OF THE UNEXPECTED
by Helen Geake

When Mrs Pretty first went to the estate agents, I don't think she expected to buy the most fabulous Anglo-Saxon treasure ever discovered along with her new house. When I first went to hear Martin Carver lecture on Sutton Hoo, in early 1987, I had no idea where it would lead. I certainly didn't think that three years later I would be helping to excavate one of the burial mounds.

In 1987 I was a first year archaeology undergraduate at University College, London. Martin was a guest lecturer, and his subject was the 1985 and 1986 Sutton Hoo excavations. He explained that the team had expected to find the remains of a prehistoric settlement in the field to the east of the burial mounds, but instead had recovered a rather unusual Middle Saxon flat cemetery. This was my first warning of the fact, well known to anyone who has worked there, that you should always expect the unexpected

at Sutton Hoo.

Martin ended his lecture by inviting us to come and work at Sutton Hoo. he said that if we could stay for more than a month, we might get to excavate a grave. This prospect was so tantalising that I signed up for five weeks, to start straight after my exams finished.

I spent almost the entire five weeks on Mound 2, which was being removed in 10cm spits. There are a lot of 10cm spits on something the size of Mound 2, and there were no graves at all. I was not particularly disappointed, as I was learning a lot and enjoying the lifestyle on site. Still, I wanted to add to my experience by excavating a feature, so I spent the rest of the summer on site. I was eventually rewarded with an exciting-looking square black patch on the side of Mound 2 . . . which, on excavation, turned out to be a decayed lump of turf from Basil Brown's 1938 dig.

I spent the summer of 1988 getting experience of finds, on an excavation in Winchester and in the Anglo-Saxon collection at Devises Museum. With this under my belt, I applied for a job as Assistant Finds Supervisor for the 1989 season at Sutton Hoo. It was my first job after graduating, and I looked forward to handling and identifying Anglo-Saxon material. The Mound 6 burial was being dug that year, and early medieval graves were confidently expected from Intervention 48, between the mounds and Top Hat Wood. Of course the unexpected happened — prehistoric field systems and settlement remains were found, there were no flat graves at all, and I got a thorough grounding in flint tools and prehistoric pottery instead.

Last year I returned to Sutton Hoo to help Angela Evans of the British Museum excavate the robber trench in Mound 7. I anticipated a painstakingly precise and delicate excavation, recovering hundreds of tiny fragments of high-status grave-goods. But after a fortnight shovelling off the remaining baulks in preparation, the first spit of the robber trench that we trowelled and sieved produced no artefacts at all other than residual prehistoric material. So the decision was made to shovel and sieve the next few spits. My relaxing summer turned into two months of hard shovelling, and barrowing down the most precipitous barrow run I have ever built — all in temperatures of nearly 100°F.

We had expected Mound 7 to contain an inhumation, as part of an Anglo-Saxon bead that had not gone through a cremation fire had been found in a rabbit hole on the north side. However, in 1990 we found over 100 pieces of burnt bone in the upper fill of the robber trench. I will not make any predictions on the basis of these until we have completed the final season of excavation this summer. Barring hurricane, flood or blizzard, this will start on the 8th of July. Bearing in mind Sutton Hoo's ability to surprise, I won't be packing until the 7th!

Helen Geake is a graduate of University College, London, who is now doing a PhD in Anglo-Saxon archaeology at the University of York. She first came to Sutton Hoo as a student in 1987, and has been a member of the site team nearly ever summer since then.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 1991-92
by Robert Simper

This has been a difficult year for the Sutton Hoo Society because of the uncertainty surrounding the future of the site. A new role has been sought whilst two of the Society's ventures have been abandoned. The Woodbridge Ferry has ceased operations after five years. It was run as a public service, but the real problems were the difficulties of finding a reliable ferryman and convincing the public that the ferry could not be operated on weekends when there were low tides in the afternoon. The ferry boat has been sold for £1,000.

The Granary Display project has also been dropped. The developer originally gave the impression that we would have the whole of the ground floor, but subsequently a staircase cut this in half, leaving two small unconnected rooms which would have made display difficult. Susceptibility to flooding was also a concern. Finally, apart from a promised grant from Woodbridge Town Council, no financial backing had been received, and the Committee were strongly against borrowing money.

There is no doubt that the public are still just as interested in Sutton Hoo because this summer, even without coverage from television and virtually nothing in the local press, the

number of visitors remained about the same. John Le Mare has worked hard publicising the site through leaflet distribution, and we have taken displays to local events. Although some members have not renewed their subscriptions, no doubt thinking this was the final year of excavation, new people have joined, keeping the numbers about the same. Another positive sign that there is still a place for the SHS was our very well attended Winter Lecture and visit to Snape.

The Society does have a role in the future because guided tours will continue and limited excavation will go on for several years to come. At some point the complex web surrounding the long-term future of this unique site has to be resolved. In June the Committee produced a Report on the future policy of the Society and its relationship to the site. This was sent to interested parties with the request that the Society should become party to the management agreement negotiated for the site.

Larry Gatter is retiring as Secretary and we must thank him for his three years of extremely efficient and tireless work. We hope that someone will step forward to take up this most responsible position.



Guiding at Sutton Hoo.

SOCIETY EVENTS

VISIT TO SNAPE ANGLO-SAXON CEMETERY

by Sue Banyard

On Sunday 22nd September about 60 people attended the site tour given by William Filmer-Sankey at Snape, where excavation work, begun on the south side of the road from Snape to Aldeburgh in September, would continue until the end of October.

In addition to the tour we were able to look around the very good exhibition which showed how the site was being excavated and what had been located so far.

Mr Filmer-Sankey began by saying the site was not working out as he had expected. Where graves were expected, there were none; and where none should have been, graves were

found. The most interesting find to date was a shallow trench filled with large flints, reddened and shattered by heating, which appeared to be a crematorium. It was thought that once dug, the trench was filled with the flints, these were then covered with wood and set alight, so heating the stones. When they were red-hot the body would be placed on the stones to be burnt. Once the cremation was completed, the remains would have been gathered up, placed in a cremation urn and buried elsewhere on the site. A funeral pyre had been previously located on the north side of the Aldeburgh road, similar to ones discovered in Saxony. Thus it appears that two kinds of cremation traditions existed at Snape.

A burial has also been located which may turn out to be significant. Nothing remains of the

body and coffin except staining in the sand. However, a wooden bucket with iron bands, similar to those from Sutton Hoo was being uncovered. Several objects buried in the grave indicated that the body was that of a man who was either a minor chieftain or nobleman.

A tumulus, previously undetected, has been located by its ring-ditch — a little more than a foot below the surface of the soil. Most of the tumulus itself had been destroyed by ploughing. In conclusion Mr Filmer-Sankey said that the final season would recommence in April 1992, finishing in June, and English Heritage had given a grant to excavate the barrow found during last season's contour survey. Only part of the cemetery site is a Scheduled Monument, and an application has been made to have the scheduled area extended to help protect the site in future.

OPEN DAY 1991

SUNDAY 15th SEPTEMBER

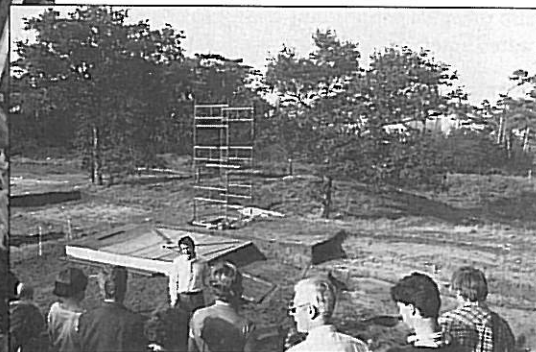
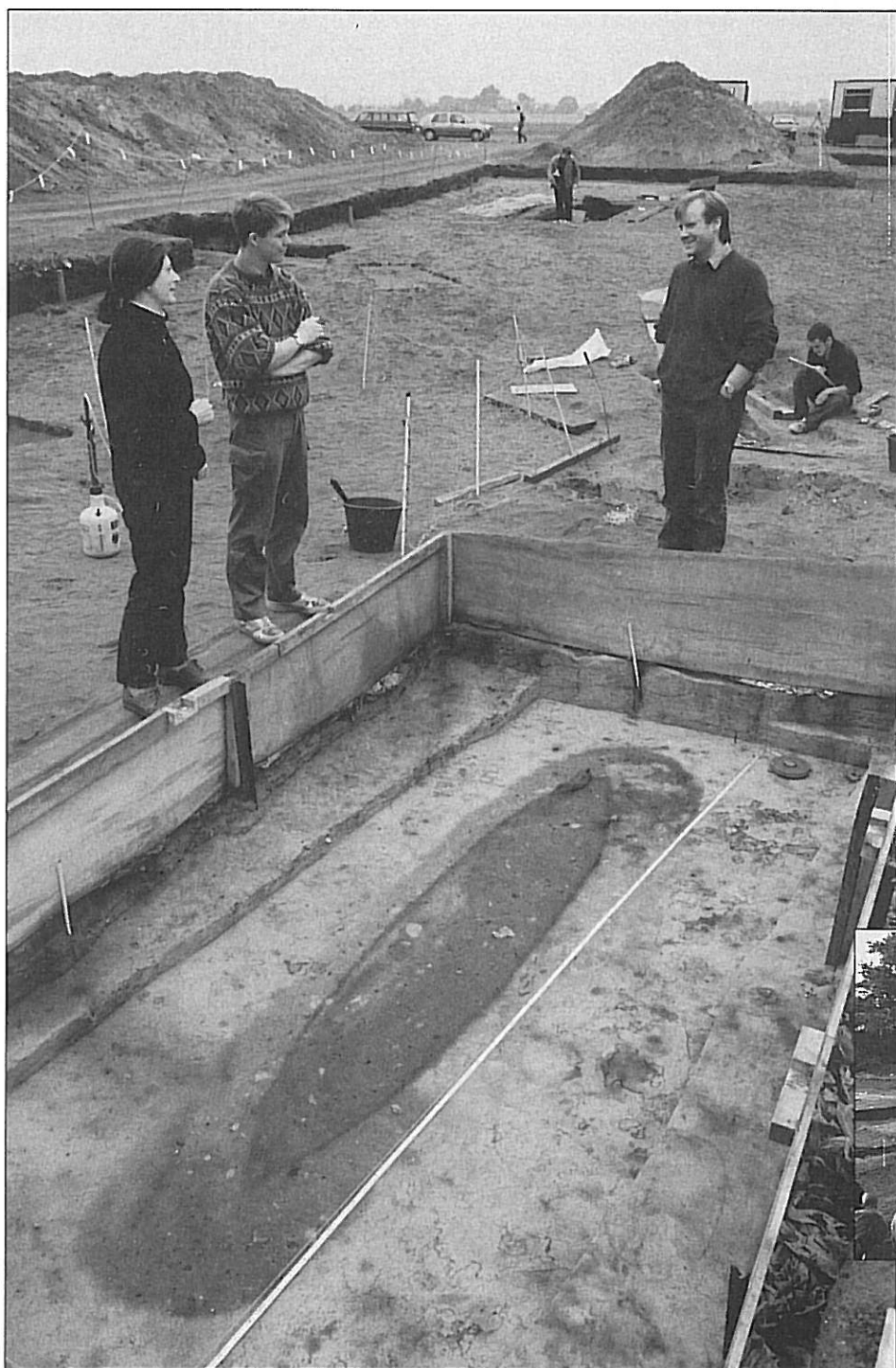
The final Open Day of the Current Excavation programme drew well over 100 members, who were once more treated to a fascinating tour of the site by Martin Carver. We were able to see the full extent of the Project's work, now that all the Sectors of the excavation are approaching completion. The detail of the robber trench in Mound 7, complete with steps down to the burial chamber, were viewed at close quarters; the clear evidence of Mound 14, and the exciting prospect of an undisturbed burial beneath the remains of Mound 18 all proved that Sutton Hoo is still able to provide interest and excitement even in its closing moments.

Rosemary Halliday again deserves our thanks for an excellent lunch which despite earlier rainfall, we were able to enjoy outdoors.

BARBECUE

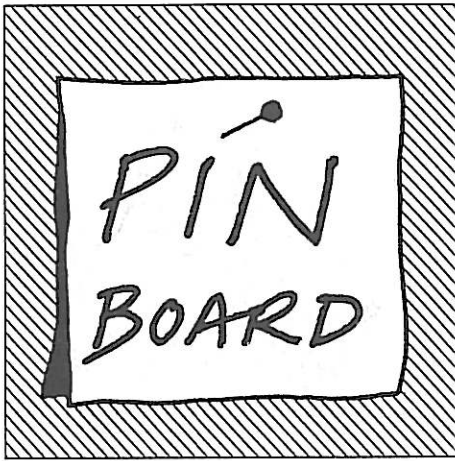
14th SEPTEMBER 1991

As the Project's on-site work drew towards a close, the guides, helpers, committee members and their partners got together with the Project staff for a bonfire and barbecue on the evening before the Open Day. Peter Berry and Rosemary Halliday (what would the Project have done without them?) provided a mouth-watering array of food, which we were able to wash down with an equally varied choice of drink — from decent wine to a rather potent 'Anglo-Saxon apple-juice'.



Above: Members of the Society at Snape Anglo-Saxon cemetery in August.

Left: Angela Evans, Tim Pestell and William Filmer-Sankey beside the grave at Snape.



DIARY

SUTTON HOO SOCIETY AGM

The next **Annual General Meeting** will be held on **Friday 17 January 1992 at 7.30 pm**, in the **Sixth Form Centre at Woodbridge School** (see location map).

COMMITTEE NOMINATIONS

Nominations for a new Secretary and 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. Please contact any committee member if you are interested in standing.

SPRING LECTURE

John Newman of Suffolk Archaeological Unit will give an illustrated talk about Boss Hall Cemetery in Ipswich and early Anglo-Saxon Suffolk, based on results from his excavations of the burial ground last year (see **Saxon** 14). The lecture has been arranged for Society Members and friends, and will be held in **St John's Hall, Woodbridge**, at **7.30pm** on **Tuesday 17 March 1992**.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At the end of the final excavation season, the Project Team would like to pass on their warmest thanks to the Society's guides, helpers and members, for their continued support and their contribution to the successful completion of fieldwork.

This season the Society's guides and helpers have again presented the story of Sutton Hoo to a steady stream of visitors. The Society has also provided a heavy-duty battery to operate the water-pump on site, and paid for hire of a

portacabin. Most importantly, the Society financed a roof for the Mound 7 excavation; a 'portable, weather-proof, see-through shelter' and a suspension cradle for the excavator of Mound 14; and a third site Irrigator. The genius behind these constructions was once again Peter Berry, whose amazing inventiveness seems inexhaustible.

SALES

BULLETIN No 8 **DELAYED BY EXTENDED FINAL SEASON — DUE OUT SPRING 1992 . . .** 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 the Department of Archaeology at the University of York (address below).

SUTTON HOO SLIDE PACKS

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

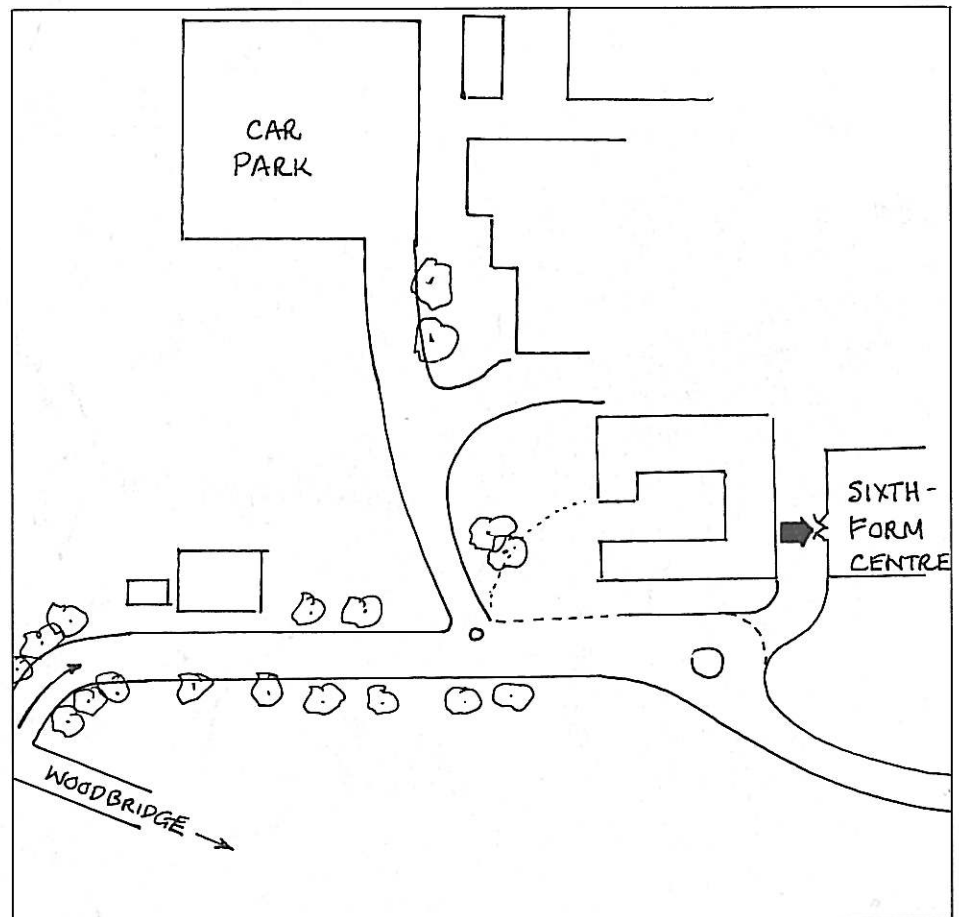
From Monday 30 December 1991, the Sutton Hoo Research Project will be based at the Department of Archaeology, University of York (full address below), and all communications should be sent to that address.

BRITISH MUSEUM VISIT

A visit has been arranged to see **'THE MAKING OF ENGLAND'** exhibition at the **BRITISH MUSEUM**, on **Saturday 22 February 1992**. A coach will leave Woodbridge Station car park at 8.00am, returning at 6.00pm. For further details and booking, contact Andrew Lovejoy on Framlingham (0728) 723214.

CREDITS

Photograph top of page 4 M.O.H. Carver, bottom inset on page 7, Robert Simper. All other photographs, Nigel MacBeth.



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