



The Newsletter of the Sutton Hoo Society

SAXON

No. 16 / 1992



A reconstruction of Mound 2 as it possibly looked in Anglo-Saxon times. The reconstruction of the monument started after Easter, following a final period of excavation. Standing approximately 4 metres high the Mound can be clearly seen from the west bank of the Deben, at Woodbridge. The whole excavation area has been landscaped and the burials around Mound 5 marked with stones.



MEMORIES OF SUTTON HOO

by Eric Houlder

I came to Sutton Hoo in I suppose the fairly conventional way. Around 1959 I was becoming more deeply involved in amateur archaeology. My local society in Yorkshire was very active as a result of the proximity of a long-term excavation, and also by the participation on that dig of a couple who had had extensive experience of archaeology from pre-war days onwards. Many were the evenings that we spent in various hostelries discussing digs, diggers, and techniques. It was their aim to dig a site 'by the book'. By this they meant to the best possible standards of the day. In the process the volunteers would absorb the same standards.

The site in question turned out to be idyllically situated on the flat farmlands close to the river Ouse. Each summer from 1960 to 1964 a small town of tents surrounded a caravan in the corner of a field. Volunteers came from all over Europe and their stories encouraged some of us to begin participating in digs other than local ones. At that time there were no career opportunities in archaeology outside the universities, so we were all classed as amateurs no matter what level of competence we possessed.

Sutton Hoo was a legendary name in archaeology. It was in all the books, and most people thought that any digging there was long-since over and done with. So, the letter on BM headed paper asking us to participate in the latest work came as a most pleasant surprise. Several other local diggers had received invitations too. We were informed that there was a camp-site at Wood Hall, Shottisham, and that a main meal would be provided in a marquee at the camp; lunch on site would also be supplied. Luxury!

The journey took a lot longer in 1967, and most of the evening seemed to be spent crossing from the A1 to Ipswich. Then we had to find our way to Shottisham, passing the site on the way.

On the following morning, a Saturday, I was taken out to the site and saw the ship under its canopy for the first time. It looked just like the pictures in books I had studied in preparation for the dig, except that it was coloured, and covered in people digging or messing about with white plaster.

The camp site was beautifully situated in an orchard, reached by walking through a walled garden. The food was brought out from the hotel kitchen, and was superb! Though some of us occasionally ventured into the hotel bar, most went into Shottisham to the Sorrel Horse, which soon became established as the 'site pub'. Mr and Mrs Markham, mine hosts, made us very welcome laying on parties, and baking fruit tarts. An abiding memory is of the juke-box in their function-room, which for some reason now forgotten would only play *The Carnival is Over*, (by *The Seekers* I think). To this day, whenever I hear that tune I am carried back to Suffolk and the late sixties.

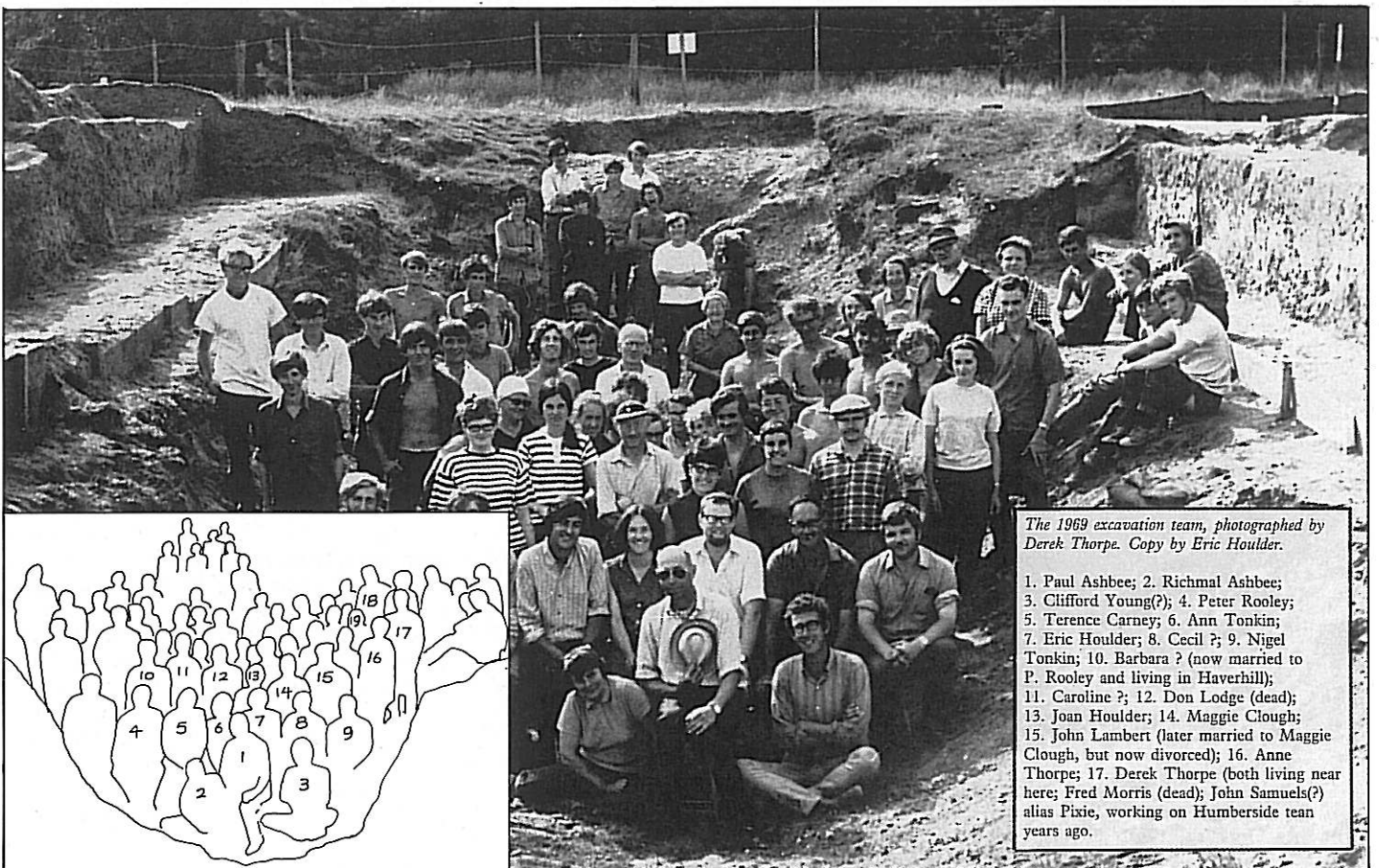
We spent two seasons camping at Wood Hall, and then as I recall, the hotel changed hands and we moved to a paddock well away from Shottisham. Even so, we continued to visit the Sorrel Horse most evenings, often going there straight from site to quench our thirsts before returning to camp for a wash and a meal. Occasionally we would venture to the coast straight from the site for a swim, and on one of these occasions I was savaged by a jellyfish and had to call a doctor out to the camp.

Work on the site was hard, dusty, but exciting. In the early seasons when digging through the 1939 dumps we kept finding bits which may have been fragments of the mound 1 burial, but which more often than not were shrapnel. On two occasions at least we found mortar-bombs. At regular intervals, flights of American fighters, usually F100s, would streak overhead, and we were often visited by helicopters from the same base.

Some interesting personalities visited the site during the time that I was there. Basil Brown himself, Charles Phillips, Miss Pretty (niece of Mrs Pretty), and many more. It was a privilege meeting people like these and talking to them about the same problems that they had faced thirty years before. On the two occasions that I have visited the current dig I felt as they must have felt, and yearned to return and continue digging!

Sutton Hoo remains a bright memory for me (and also I guess, for veterans of the two previous campaigns there) amidst the distractions of earning a living and raising a family. It is no ordinary site, and the small band of us who have been lucky enough to work there seem to retain something of its magic.

Eric Houlder was a site supervisor at Sutton Hoo during 1968-9, and now teaches history at the King's School at Pontefract. He is also site photographer for the Wood Hall Project, Womersley, North Yorkshire, and working to establish a Society of Archaeological Site Photographers. His address is 31 Fairview, Carleton, PONTEFRACT WF8 3NT.



The 1969 excavation team, photographed by Derek Thorpe. Copy by Eric Houlder.

1. Paul Ashbee; 2. Richmal Ashbee;
3. Clifford Young(?); 4. Peter Rooley;
5. Terence Carney; 6. Ann Tonkin;
7. Eric Houlder; 8. Cecil ?; 9. Nigel Tonkin;
10. Barbara ? (now married to P. Rooley and living in Haverhill);
11. Caroline ?; 12. Don Lodge (dead);
13. Joan Houlder; 14. Maggie Clough;
15. John Lambert (later married to Maggie Clough, but now divorced); 16. Anne Thorpe;
17. Derek Thorpe (both living near here; Fred Morris (dead); John Samuels(?) alias Pixie, working on Humberside ten years ago.

Upon my arrival at the very start of the Summer '91 season the Sutton Hoo site had been inhabited for some time by the archaeological team preparing for the beginning of the excavations. As one of five volunteers on site I did not expect such a high level of training as the university students taking part in the Field School; my best hopes had been to listen and learn in preparation for my own university course — but I was in for a pleasant surprise.

During my first week I became familiar with that essential piece of equipment — the trowel. The most useful lesson being to arrive early enough to get the least worn-out one! To begin with I was out of my depth; I had no idea why the area I was working on was enigmatically named "Intervention 50", nor to what people were referring when they spoke of "photo-clearing two modules by 3pm". With the help of supervisors such as Justin, Annette and Sarah (whose surnames I never did get to know), I soon learned to clean a "module" (an area 8m by 4m) in preparation for photographing and also became adept at recognising the various finds we uncovered, and at spotting Iron-Age ditches, post-holes, possible graves, and the inevitable rabbit-runs.

At the beginning we had been given an introduction to the site and were told the hopes for the excavation — and it left us uncertain as to whether we could accomplish the apparently daunting task before us. In the three weeks we were there the site was transformed and much, if not all of what we had set out to do was achieved, and some of the questions posed answered. Professor Carver summed up our efforts at the end of the three week session, giving us a site tour showing us the fruits of our contribution to the labour on the site.

The most important lesson I learnt was what archaeology is really all about. It's about



James is third in from the right on the bottom row.

teamwork — a group of people working together, with everybody doing their share — whether helping in the kitchen, or out on the site. (Emptying the portable toilets does, however, go beyond the call of duty!).

The site also united people from all over the world with a common cause, our main concern being to get those "modules" done by 3pm and to get those questions answered. Equally enjoyable were the parties round the bonfire, going on well into the morning! I shall always have fond memories of my first "dig".

James Mower is a sixth-former at Woodbridge School studying History, Geography and English 'A'-levels. He will be spending the next academic year teaching in Jordan, and also gaining archaeological experience in preparation for university, where he hopes to specialise in Near Eastern archaeology.

SOCIETY REPORTS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Business was again brief, with one new Committee member being elected — Sue Banyard will replace Clare Foss. Larry Gatter, although remaining as Hon. Secretary will no longer be organising guiding. No-one volunteered to take on this daunting task — but since the AGM Andrew Lovejoy has agreed, and if you are not a guide already, then it is he you should contact if you wish to be involved.

AGM LECTURE

Martin Carver summarised the events of the final season — which ended on a high note for the team. Martin began with an account of events on Mound 14 on the eastern periphery of the site. The excavation revealed that it had been in the process of being robbed (probably in the 19th century) when a sudden cloud-burst caused the sides of the trench to collapse burying many small objects. Their recovery was abandoned by the robbers, and the archaeologists were able to retrieve nearly 100 finds including small silver shoe buckles and a chateleine.

Just as everything was winding down, so Sutton Hoo surprised everyone yet again. Excavation of a recently identified ploughed-out mound on the western periphery (No.17)

produced the unexpected — two graves, and completely undisturbed. One contained a young warrior with his sword, and the other his horse (see **Saxon 15**).

Martin then outlined what he believes to be the chronology of the site — starting with a phase of family burials which may begin with Mound 17, followed by a cremation phase which includes Mounds 5, 6 and 7, and culminating in a period of extravagant burials which includes Mounds 14 and 2 and ended with Mound 1. These latter burials reflect a desire to promote the Scandinavian links of the Wuffingas during a period when politically they were under pressure from incoming Christianity and the Franks.

SITE PRESENTATION

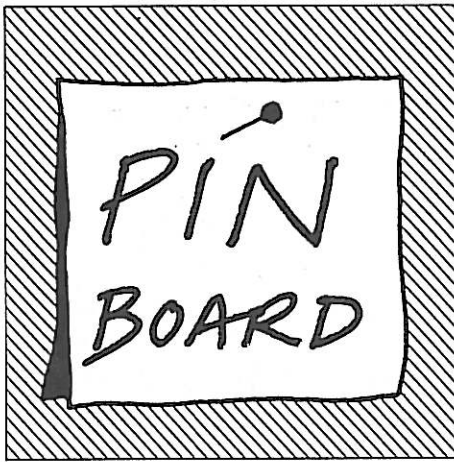
Following the lecture Martin was keen to test the reaction of the meeting to his plans for the future of the site. Negotiations with English Heritage were continuing, but there was a need to establish a clear management agreement for the site with a presentation design based on a feasibility study and market research. As a rough guide the members present were balloted on suggestions for various on-site reconstructions, with the majority favouring a covered reconstruction of the ship in Mound 1; other mounds reconstructed to their original

outlines; the replication of the prince and horse burial and the sandmen around Mound 5. Fewer supported the idea of reconstructing the Mound 2 burial chamber or the robber trenches of Mounds 6 or 7. There was support for an on-site display or some form of off-site Anglo-Saxon Heritage Centre.

GUIDES CHRISTMAS GET-TOGETHER

The Site Guides assembled once more before Christmas for their social evening giving the Chairman the opportunity to thank them personally for their hard work over the summer period. This year, we also had the opportunity to thank Jenny Glazebrook for her untiring support and friendship. Many guides will recall her pre-season briefings on cold April days, and moments of cheery comfort waiting for those nearly-always-late booked parties to arrive! As a token of the Society's appreciation of all Jenny's work as Project Administrator, Robert Simper presented her with a brooch and bracelet of amber and silver-gilt.

We all wish Jenny the very best in her new job as Managing Editor of *East Anglian Archaeology*.



DIARY

SUTTON HOO OPENING TIMES

There will be guided tours of the site on weekend afternoons at 2.00 and 3.00pm over Easter, and then from May 23-24 to September 5-6. Don't forget, Society members can join the tours free of charge (just show your membership card).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

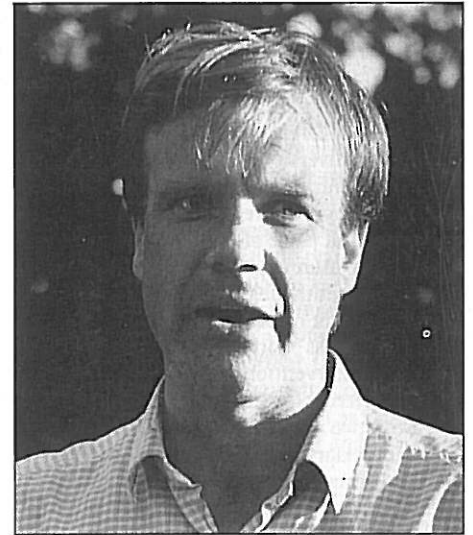
VISIT TO SNAPE

William Filmer Sankey will be directing excavations at the Snape Anglo-Saxon cemetery from April 22 to June 26 this year. A site tour for members of the Sutton Hoo Society has been arranged for **Sunday June 14, at 2.30pm**. Anyone interested in joining the group should contact Robert or Pearl Simper, tel: Shottisham 411273.

TOUR OF SAXO-NORMAN SITES

Committee members are planning a tour of Saxo-Norman sites in Suffolk and Essex — particularly those not generally open to the public where special arrangements for access have to be made. The tour will take place on a **Sunday in mid-September** (date to be confirmed), and if enough people join the group, a minibus or coach will be provided. For further details, contact Robert or Pearl Simper (as above).

YOUR LETTERS... we want to know your views on **Saxon**, the Society and the research project; and we are especially keen to receive your ideas and suggestions for future articles. Letters should be addressed to the Editor, Sutton Hoo Society (address below).



SOCIETY EVENTS

VISIT TO THE BRITISH MUSEUM

A coach party of members and friends visited the "Making of England" exhibition at the British Museum on Saturday 22nd February. Angela Evans gave us an introductory talk on the main theme of the exhibition — the change from the Saxon Heptarchy of separate kingdoms, through to the establishment of both a concept and a kingdom, of England, inextricably entwined with the Church.

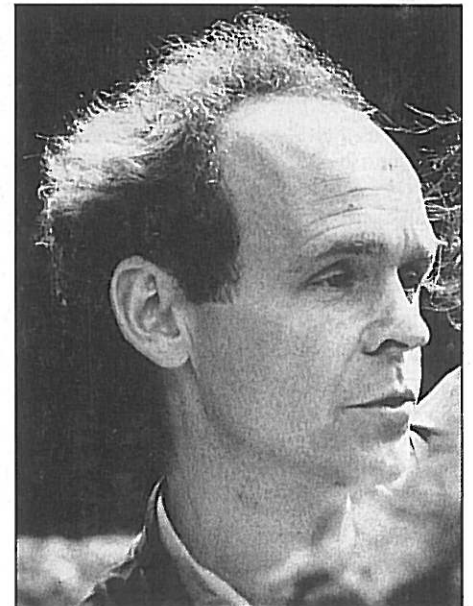
It was pleasing to be able to see some of the Sutton Hoo finds in context with others of similar age and provenance, including the recently-discovered Boss Hall finds as well as the more anciently discovered 'Ixworth Cross'. The exhibition brought home the place of Sutton Hoo as the first page of ENGLISH history.

Thanks to Andrew Lovejoy who organised the trip.

SPRING LECTURE

John Newman talked to Society members and friends on "Early Anglo-Saxon Suffolk". John outlined the recent work carried out by the Suffolk Unit, giving an overview of the County during the 7th and 8th centuries. His own particular work on the S.E. Suffolk Survey (fieldwalking in the Sutton Hoo region), and the excavation at Boss Hall both expanding our view of the period.

Fieldwalking has identified many settlement sites, and the finds from Boss Hall indicate an important wealthy group living on land which may have belonged to the East Anglian Royal Family in the 7th century. The burial which attracted most attention (see **Saxon 14**) was that of a woman, and was thought to be a later (early 8th century) insertion into the cemetery. She may have been a very elderly lady but still no doubt careful of her appearance — one of her treasured possessions was a silver cosmetic set.



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Sue Banyard Jenny Glazebrook Lord Lewin Malcolm Miles John Newman Sam Newton Pearl Simper Mike Weaver

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