



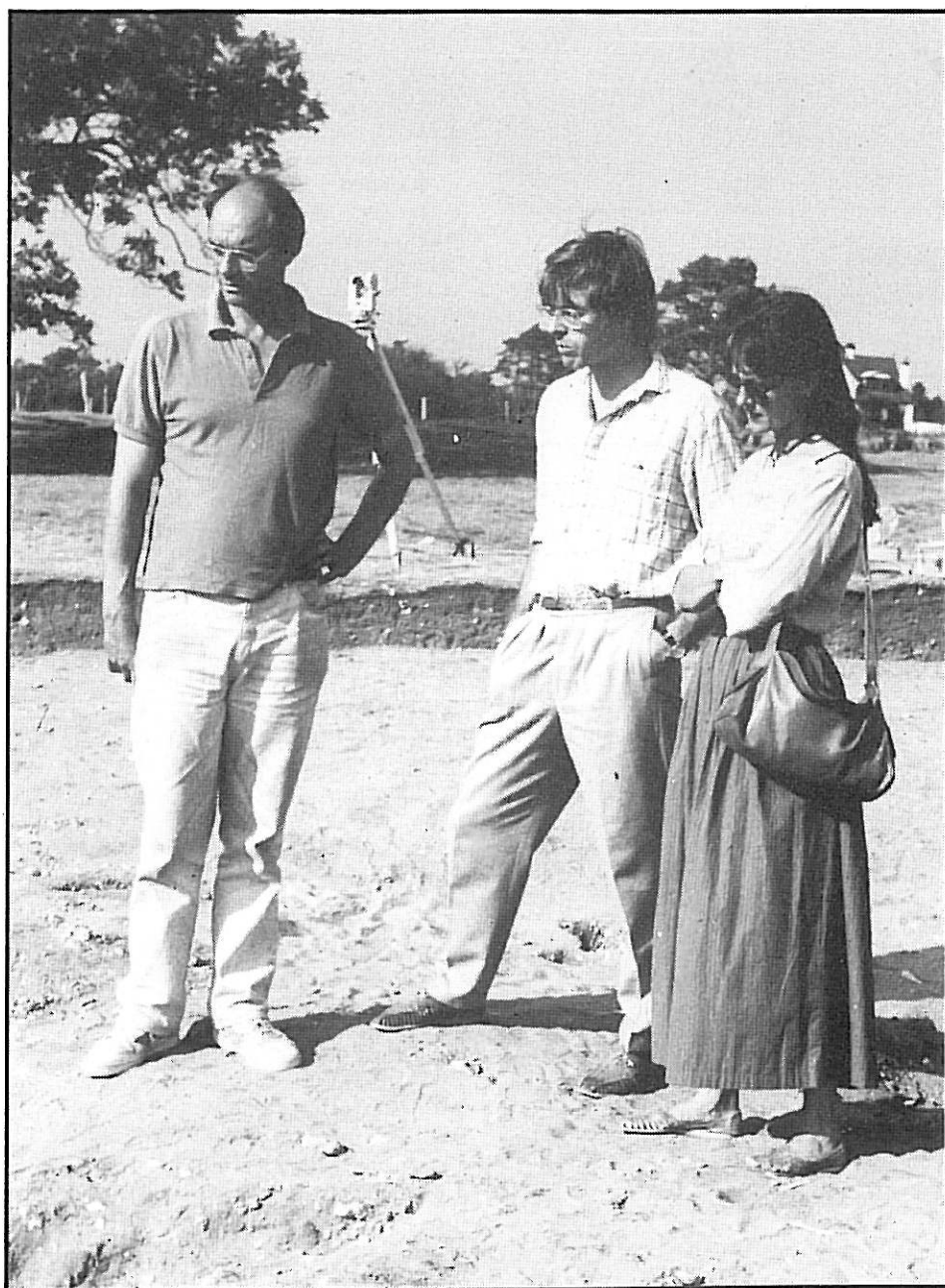
The Newsletter of the Sutton Hoo Society

# SAXON

President: HRH The Duke of Edinburgh

No. 12 / 1990

## VISITORS AT SUTTON HOO by Philip Rahtz



*Ian Hodder (centre) on a visit to the excavations last summer.*

Visitors to Sutton Hoo are well catered for by the Sutton Hoo Society. But there are some who expect and indeed sometimes demand a fuller explanation of what is going on and what has been discovered. These are academics who take a keen professional interest in the dig; either because they are Anglo-Saxon scholars, or because they are just interested to see such a world-famous site and the techniques being used by Martin Carver and his team.

When one is director of an excavation, watching closely every aspect of the work in the field, and in the finds and drawing departments, it is very difficult to have to leave the excavation to spend an hour or more talking to an important visitor. Yet not only would it be academically unmannerly to refuse to give up time in this way, but also (and we have seen this very clearly at Sutton Hoo) Martin Carver, in expounding the archaeology to an informed colleague, orders and clarifies 'the story' in his own mind; and sometimes he thinks of new interpretations while he is talking. And of course the distinguished visitor will often suggest important new ideas; or parallels for new finds. There may also be awkward questions asked which may point to inconsistencies and anomalies in the scenario.

It is thus very important that Martin Carver has highly competent assistants to whom he can delegate the supervision of work when he has to take time off to talk to visitors, or to lecture to prestigious visiting societies. Who are these people whose arrival affects the dig in this way? We can answer this by looking at a few of the scholars who visited Sutton Hoo in 1989.

**Rupert Bruce-Mitford** devoted many years of his life to the publication of the three great British Museum volumes on the earlier work; he was also the initiator of the discussions which led to the present excavations.

**Brian Hope-Taylor** is the excavator of the great palace of the Northumbrian kings at Yeavering. This is a site similar in date to Sutton Hoo. A palace of this kind should exist somewhere within a few miles of the barrow cemetery: the court of the East Anglian royal dynasty.

*Philip Rahtz (right) on site in 1988.*



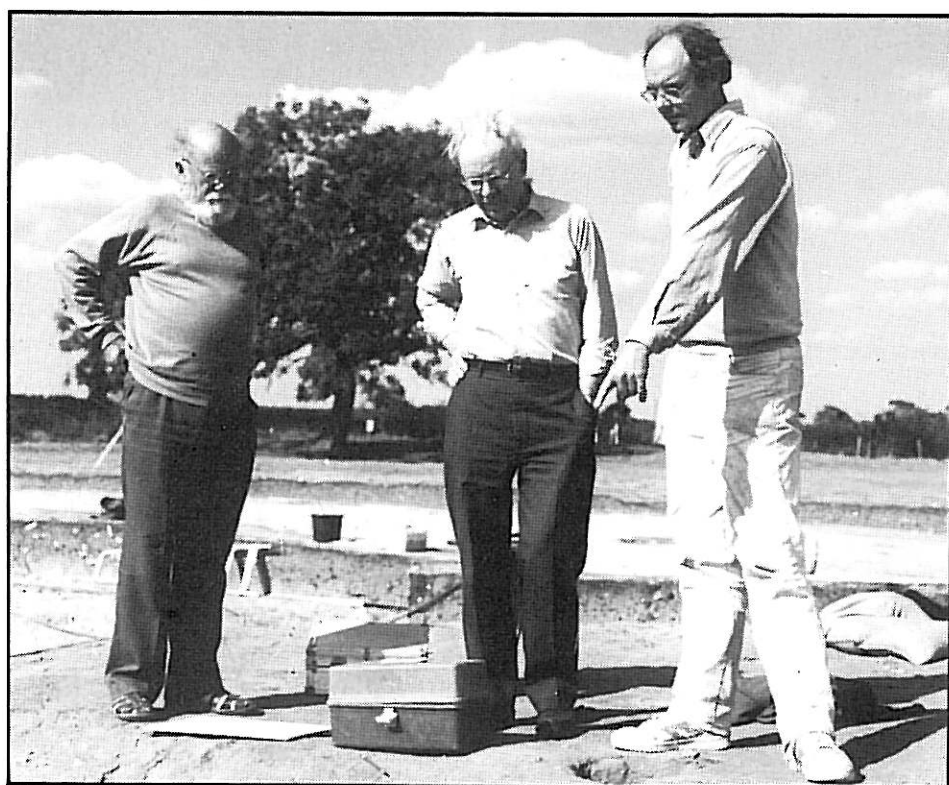
**Leo Biek** is an archaeological scientist. He is primarily interested in soil residues, stains, corrosion products, wear patterns, and computer graphics. These topics, though unspectacular, are nevertheless fundamental to a full understanding of the site.

**Richard Bradley** is professor of archaeology at the University of Reading. Although primarily he is one of Britain's most eminent prehistorians, he takes a keen interest in all periods; and in new ways of interpreting archaeological evidence.

**Ian Hodder**, from the University of Cambridge, is known as one of the principal British theorists; he is especially concerned with the nature of perception, past and present, so he had plenty to talk to Martin Carver about.

Sutton Hoo has of course interested scholars other than archaeologists. So we had visits from **David Dumville**, a Dark Age historian; **Sam Newton**, an authority on Anglo-Saxon literature and language; and from academics from Russia, Scandinavia, America, Italy and Czechoslovakia.

Our director has had a busy time. If he has had a bad night, he may inwardly groan when yet another illustrious visitor rolls up. But Martin is an expansive sort of chap, generous with his time and expertise. He usually takes a positive pleasure in trying out his latest revolutionary interpretations on a new mind. According to him, archaeological facts are useful only in that they provide the basis for a good story. He is a saga-weaver in the best Anglo-Saxon tradition, but I have yet to see him perform with the aid of a lyre.



*Leo Biek (left) discusses the problems of the Mound 6 robber trench with Martin Carver during the 1989 season.*

Philip Rahtz has dedicated most of his working life to making discoveries about Britain, particularly south-west Britain, in the Dark Ages (4-7th C AD). He is a gifted field archaeologist, and author of many books and articles including the popular *Invitation to Archaeology* (1984). Philip was the first professor appointed to the Chair of Archaeology at York, in 1978. He has recently retired as President of the Council for British Archaeology, and he is a member of the Sutton Hoo Research Trust.

# BATTEN DOWN THE HATCHES

by Jenny Glazebrook



*The storm struck roof.*



*Even the site toilets didn't escape.*

Most of the country was battered by the storms of January and February. Sutton Hoo, being an exposed site, was no exception.

On 25 January, I arrived at the site blissfully unaware of the trouble in store, having missed the early morning weather forecast. Nigel had heard it, and seemed rather nervous. He became increasingly edgy as the day drew on and the gusts of wind grew stronger. By midday it was difficult to continue typing because the office portakabin, buffeted by the wind, was bobbing around like a boat, and the keyboard was dancing about on the desk. 'I don't think we should be up here' said Nigel. Just at that moment, a violent blast lifted the portakabin off its feet, and we hurriedly abandoned ship.

At home in Ipswich, sheltered amongst rows of houses, I listened as the wind howled down the chimney, branches and slates crashed to the ground and dustbins and other debris clattered along the street. It was difficult to image the scene at Sutton Hoo.

Next day, we gingerly approached the site. Liberal quantities of yellow fibreglass insulation were stuck to the hedges all along the footpath from the road, leading us to expect some structural damage to the buildings. I saw (with a sinking heart) that the toilets had blown over, also two of the caravans. The end of the exhibition room had caved in, and some of the roof had blown off. Through the shattered windows, the exhibition boards could be seen scattered about the floor. Two of the portakabins had been blown off their foundations, and their contents were in total disorder. Out on site, Mound 6 was still safely wrapped up under polythene and chickenwire, but the replica sandmen were open to the elements. We never did find their wooden covers, only a few splintered lengths of frame. Down in Top Hat Wood, another tree had narrowly missed the British Museum hut, its branches just grazing the far corner as it fell.

The whole of that day, although windy, was spent clearing up. Caravans were heaved back onto their wheels, small holes were patched, display boards were rescued, and the portakabins were hoisted back onto their foundations. As the stormy weather continued

the broken roof became a real problem, and heavy rain threatened to worsen the damage before builders could be got in to carry out repairs. There was a huge (60 x 30 ft) tarpaulin on site, but arranging it over the roof could only be attempted with extra help. Society members Frank Cheney, Andrew Lovejoy and



*Repairs underway. The display is now open for 'business as usual'.*

John Hamer saved the day by volunteering for the job, and spent an energetic morning wrestling with miles of green sheeting, ropes and sandbags. Thanks to their labours the remains of the building were protected from the worst of the weather until the insurance claim was sorted out, and the builders arrived to repair the damage. It looks as though the exhibition will be back in place before the site opens to the public this season, after all.

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# EDITORIAL

## by Rosemary Hoppitt

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Those of you who attended the Spring lecture will be aware now (if you weren't before) of the ancient claim to fame that Ipswich has as a market place and port, providing evidence along with Southampton, Sandwich, London and York for the re-emergence of urban life after the end of the Roman empire. The 7th century beginnings of Ipswich are unique in being amongst the earliest, and the town surely deserves more attention from scholars and the public than it has so far been given. York — rightly proud of its Viking past — has promoted itself in a way undreamed of when I was young. Then York (my nearest town) was a Roman city, with little public interest in the Saxons, Vikings, or Normans. The medieval streets and the Minster were alright — they brought in the tourists, but the Saxons and Vikings were practically unheard of. Then along came the redevelopment of the Coppergate site, and suddenly York stopped being Roman and started being Viking.

Since then the Jorvik Viking Centre has been one of the top attractions in the City, and

a model for similar developments elsewhere.

Perhaps the time has come for Ipswich to blossom — it sits surrounded by a wealth of Anglo-Saxon sites which are providing new insights into the beginnings of the East Anglian Kingdom. The 'Pride of Ipswich' campaign run by the local press is very much based in the present — perhaps a little time invested in appreciating Ipswich's important past would give an additional boost to the town's image. There are plans for a new European Visual Arts Centre on the Docks — do the originators of this idea know how appropriate the chosen site will be? For Ipswich was one of the first real European ports in England, and Sutton Hoo itself could claim to be a European Arts Centre — with an assemblage of items from all over Europe, from the Celtic north and west, from Scandinavia and the Baltic, to the very eastern edges of the Continent in Byzantium.

What York did in the 1970s and 80s was to encourage interest and investment in its new-found image as a Viking town, and despite criticism of some aspects of the enterprise ('the

Ooh-Aah approach to finds'), it has been successful in gaining and holding the interest and awareness of the public. Perhaps Suffolk ought to consider a similar venture, (learning from both the successes and mistakes made by the Heritage Industry) and put Ipswich and its Anglo-Saxon hinterland on the map and in the minds of the public.

\*\* Since this editorial was written, the 15 year Borough Plan has been published for Ipswich. Included in it are suggestions for such a Centre, probably located on the Cox Lane Car Park site where, in a previous phase of development, finds of Ipswich Ware established the town's early beginnings. Keith Wade comments on the need to be realistic — Ipswich is not York, and does not have an established tourist trade to compare with the millions that pass through that City — yet if investment can be found it could generate a new trade, bringing together the Anglo-Saxon heritage of the whole of Suffolk, focusing interest in the town, and encouraging visits to more isolated outposts such as Sutton Hoo and Snape.

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## SOCIETY EVENTS

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### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM was held in the Lecture Theatre at Woodbridge School on Friday 26th January. During the business part of the meeting, the Committee were re-elected, and Martin Carver endorsed his appreciation of the work done by the Society and the Guides in particular.

The following lecture proved to be another fascinating exposition in which Martin Carver reminded us of the past of Sutton Hoo (both the history of its archaeology, and its Bronze-Age inhabitants), and then led the audience through a host of more abstract ideas about the Anglo-Saxons and their means of cultural expression, the beginnings of kingship, the development of allegiance and dynasties, and the significance of these elements during the subsequent introduction of Christianity. The evidence from Sutton Hoo has always posed more questions than it has answered — but clearly this demanding site is giving Martin and his team tremendous inspiration to step beyond the simple interpretation of the site remains, and to pose some interesting hypotheses about the ways in which English society began.

### GUIDES' CHRISTMAS GET-TOGETHER

Despite the ravages of influenza, a goodly number of Site Guides, the Committee and their spouses managed to meet before Christmas for an informal get-together with drinks and food. The Chairman was then able to officially thank the Guides for their help through the season, and encourage them to continue with their contribution of time and effort in 1990. Thanks go to the Hoppitts for their friendly hospitality, and Committee members for providing a wonderful spread of food and drink.

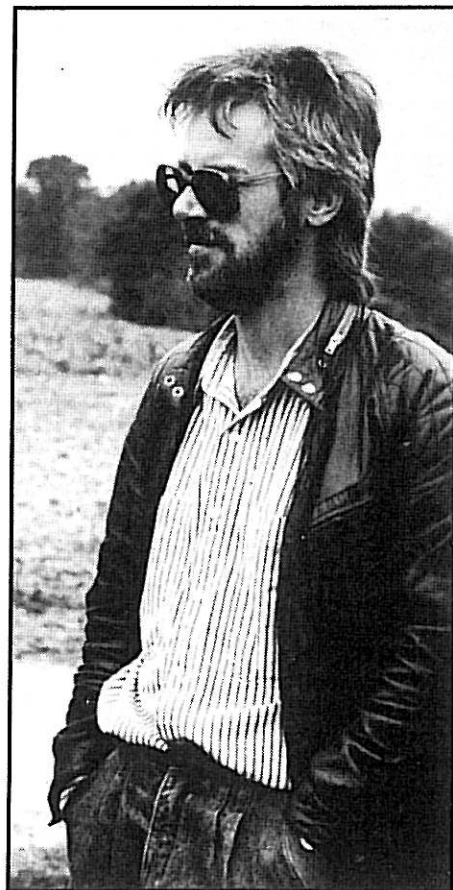
### SPRING LECTURE

A new venture this spring, which we hope will be repeated in the future was to hold a public lecture. The Committee invited Keith Wade, Urban Archaeologist of the Suffolk County Archaeological Unit, to talk to the Society on 'The Earliest Origins of Ipswich'.

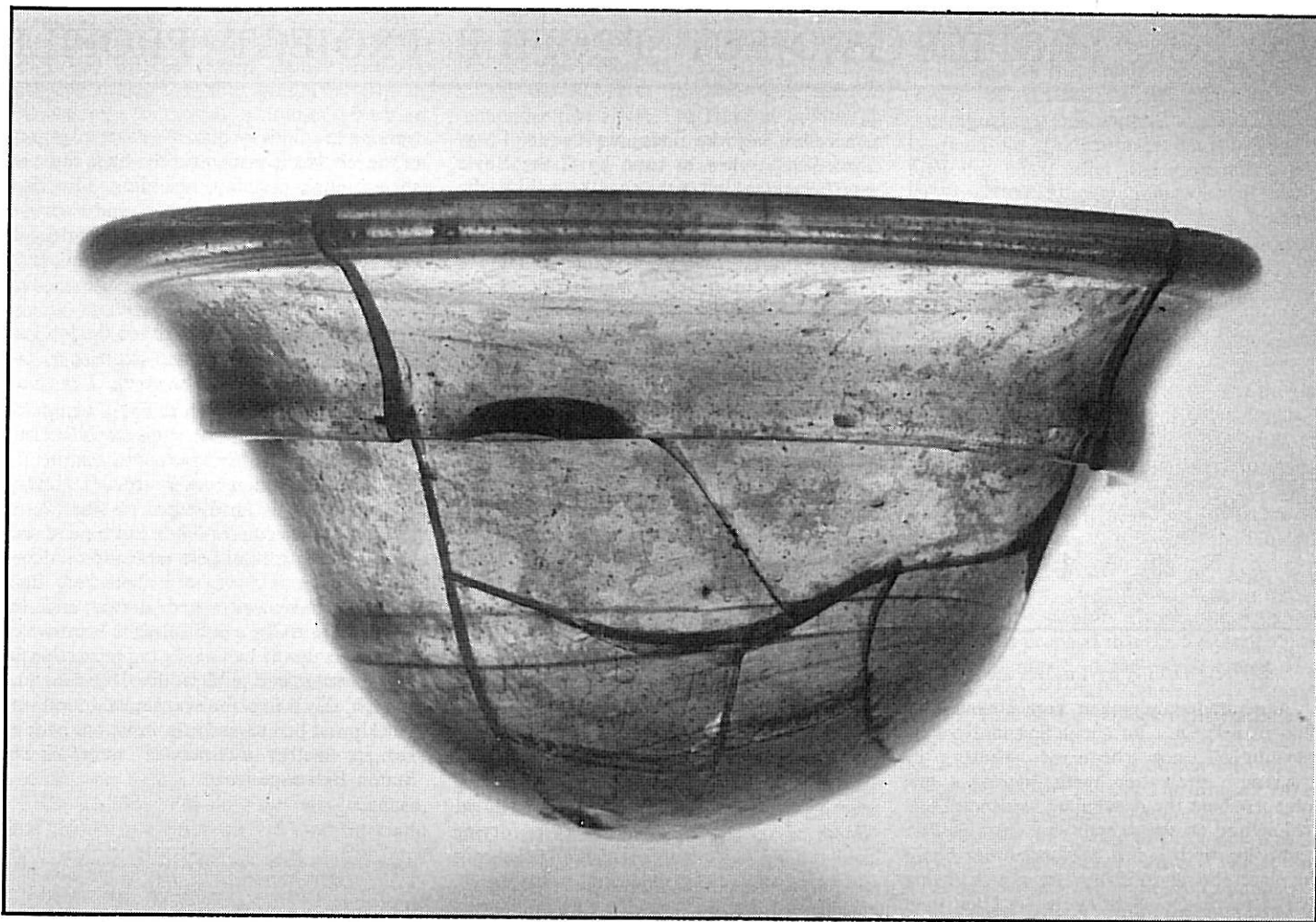
The audience of members and public enjoyed an interesting and informative lecture illustrating the embryonic beginnings of urban life in Saxon England in the 7th century; which at Ipswich was most probably deliberately instituted, encouraged and fostered by the royal house of the Wuffingas, and therefore presents another face of the society which produced the burials at Sutton Hoo. In addition to the recent large scale excavations in the Buttermarket and Foundation St. evidence has been built up over a great many years from smaller excavations carried out in advance of re-development in the town. Of major significance are the pottery finds of 'Ipswich Ware', crude — but at that time sophisticated — wheel-made jars and bowls. Ipswich Ware was made in Ipswich and traded throughout eastern England — an important indicator of the significance of Ipswich as a growing trading centre.

Ipswich artisans and merchants dealt in glassware, pottery, leather goods, metalwork and grindstones; some for export and others for a domestic market. Imports came mainly from the Rhineland — still the main trading partner of the town. The site of the early Strand coincided with the line of Quay St., now some distance from the modern waterfront. Ipswich has been trading almost 1300 years on the same site — quite an achievement.

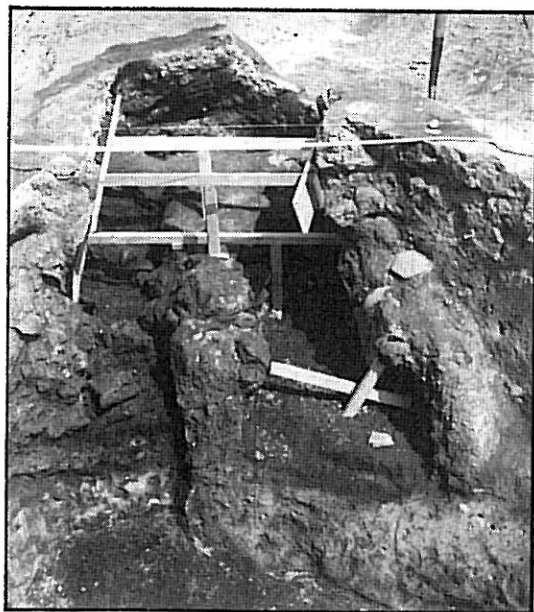
Our thanks to Keith for giving up his time to come and talk to the Society.



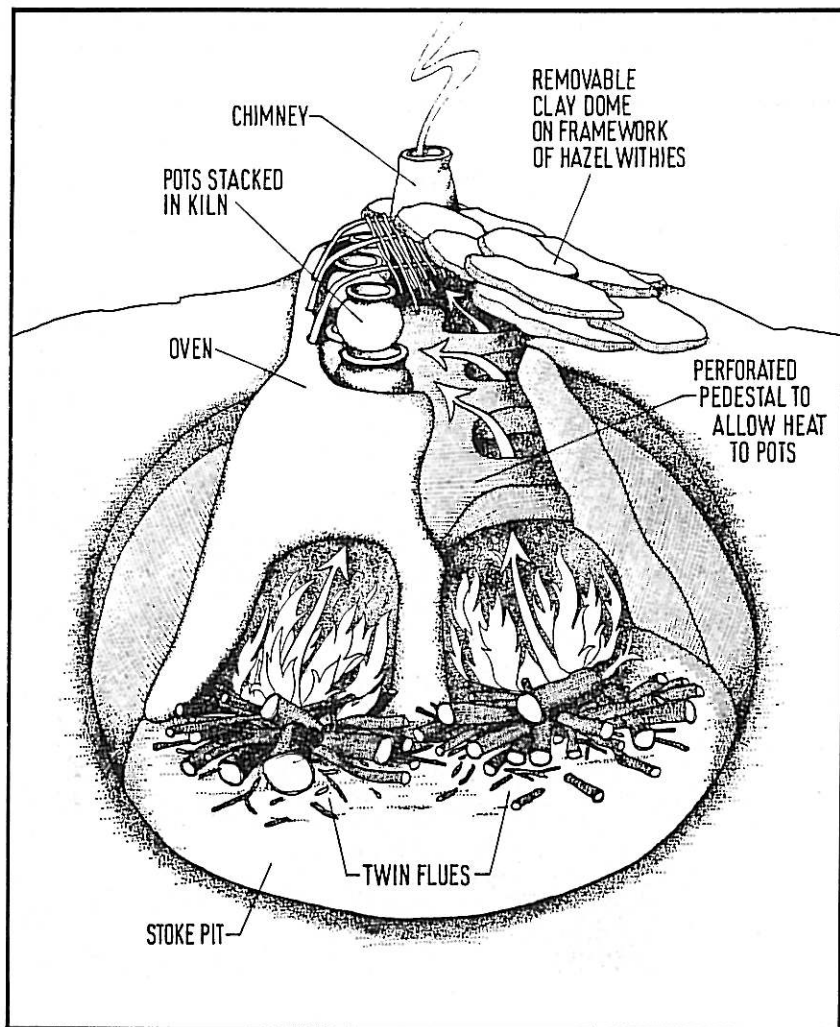
*Keith Wade at Sutton Hoo for a Trust meeting in 1988.*



One of the 7th C glass palm cups from the 'warrior' grave. Photo: David Nuttall



The Ipswich Ware pottery kiln.  
Photo: Suffolk County Council



Reconstruction of the Middle Saxon Pottery  
Kiln excavated on the Buttermarket site.  
Drawing: David Nuttall



BLIND DATE by Linda Peacock

As an undergraduate at York University I thought I knew a lot about Sutton Hoo: its romantic if not chequered history, its progressive excavation methods, and a few rumours about the demanding work schedule. So I arrived on site to begin my first job after graduation with a few preconceptions about the place, though in reality not quite knowing what I was in for. Needless to say I was soon straightened out as the summer excavation season got under way.

The first surprise was finding out what "Finds Manager" actually entails as a job. I think I could be forgiven for assuming it

concerned only the finds, but not so. I was immediately taken in hand by Cathy Royle who introduced me to the site, the archive, the finds system, the environmental programme, the teaching methods, the computers and the whole universe of Sutton Hoo, including a crash course in generator maintenance and a near-disastrous lesson in the "curation of recent environmental debris" (Elsan duty) which left me with just enough time to gasp for breath and no time to panic before the work really got going.

In all there are 79,000 finds from the current excavation. The materials vary from prehistoric flint tools to very delicate Early Medieval textiles. All have to be carefully stabilised and recorded. Some need further specialist attention and analysis, like the Early Medieval metalwork and textiles, and the pollen and soil micromorphology samples. Even though the job is firmly rooted on site, a constant exchange of information between a wide range of interests in archaeology has to be maintained to ensure that we get what we are looking for and know how to look after it. Methods sometimes have to be changed or modified: for example, after a month of sieving the occasional bucketful of ancient soil, we found ourselves erecting bulk-sievers, drying and sorting vast quantities of the buried-soils for those elusive environmental remains.

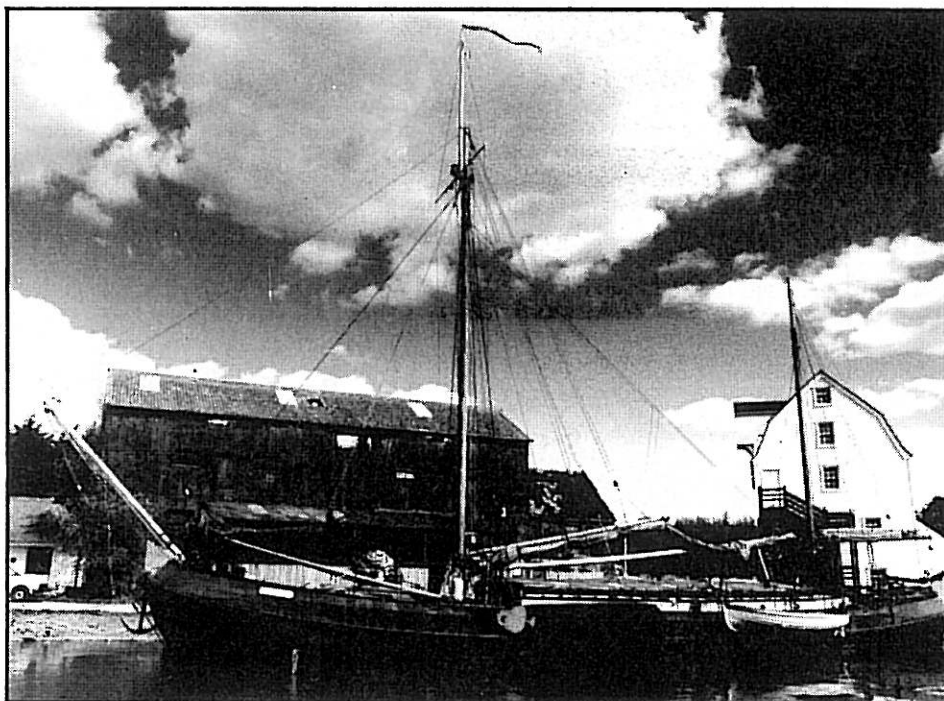
Having no real teaching experience, I found the Field School the most challenging and rewarding part of the job. Each student spends 2-3 days working with me in the Finds room. The aim of this is to give students the ability to assist, or even supervise, in the

running of a finds system. We cover all aspects of the job from the moment the finds come off site, through cleaning, recording, identification, computerisation, care and storage. Constantly working with a wide variety of people — from local volunteers and sixth-formers with little or no experience to visiting European, American and Japanese archaeologists — ensured that I learned the job fast, picking up a much wider experience and insight into archaeology en route. I can now claim the unique ability (I think) of being able to say "burnt flint" in Japanese, Russian, Czech, Spanish and Italian: not to mention the all important foreign cookery tips . . . Hurray!

Before the dust had settled on what was in many ways a hectic season, it was time to start the real hard work of post excavation indoors. All the records have to be checked, finds analysed, inventoried and drawn and the Sutton Hoo *Bulletin* published; in short we all have to tie up the loose ends in preparation for interpretation and publication of the site. Sure enough, this brings the next season round very quickly and before we know it, we are back on site for another international round in the Sutton Hoo experience.

Linda Peacock is a recent graduate of York University, now working as Finds Manager at Sutton Hoo. She is based in the Department of Archaeology at York over the winter months and on site during the season.

## THE ROLE OF THE SOCIETY by Rosemary Hoppitt and Robert Simper



Woodbridge Tide Mill and Granary.

### THE PAST

It seems that whatever we write, the question of the future raises its head. Both the present authors wrote briefly on the subject in *Saxon 11*. It is a question that both the Society and the Trust have to address — for it is important that we can all see where we are going after the excavation work finishes at the end of the 1991 Season. (Yes, that's right — it isn't long is it?).

The Society was established to support the Project. For some more recent members it may be interesting just to turn aside and examine the brief history of the Society so far.

The inaugural meeting of the Society was held at the Seckford Hall Hotel on Sunday 3rd June 1984. (The Project was by then just over a year old). Unfortunately the Minutes don't list those present, but it was quite a large gathering I remember. At that meeting a Committee was elected, to be Chaired by Gwen Dyke. (Gwen later declined the invitation, and the Chairmanship of the subsequent meetings passed to Martin Carver, until Malcolm Miles took over in 1985). The basics were hammered out — such mundane things as subscriptions, need for charitable status, constitution plans and the like.

Martin floated the idea of an Anglo-Saxon Heritage Project, with possibilities of a replica ship and display centre. Andy Seedhouse suggested such a replica should be built in Woodbridge to act as a tourist attraction. Martin also raised the subject of re-establishing the ferry across the Deben — an idea which at one stage provoked a Woodbridge Town Councillor to remark 'over my dead body'. The Councillor is however still alive, despite the running of the ferry. Mike Weaver crystallised our thoughts — that the main aim should be the establishment of a strong Society, in which such ideas could be developed.

*Saxon* made its first appearance in November 1984, with Mark Mitchells as its Editor. It has since then appeared twice a year on average, with a special Anniversary Issue in Spring 1989.

The early Committee meetings revolved around the problems of getting site facilities organised, public access and signposting. We had the benefit of committee members who took on particular tasks with a will, and by the meeting of 15th April 1985, delivery had been made to the site of two portacabins (one for a photographic display), a landing stage had been constructed, a ticket hut put up, and tickets and souvenirs bought in. Liz Miles, our Membership Secretary was able to report a membership of 221.

On 4th May 1985 the Ferry was launched, and thanks to a great deal of hard work and dedication to purpose by Robert Simper (now Chairman), has continued since then to ferry visitors across to the site. All the hard work behind the scenes now came to fruition. During these first years Mike Weaver organised the guiding — the job being taken over by Bob Beardsley in 1986, with Larry Gatter taking over the reins (whip?) in 1989. The organisation of site visits has been finely tuned as experience has built up, but as all Guides know, there is still the 5pm visitor who has (honestly) travelled all the way from Liverpool (or somewhere else equally far away)

just to visit Sutton Hoo, certain that 5pm *was* the time on the poster, and really they do have to go home tomorrow.

At the AGM of 1986 we were able to announce that HRH The Duke of Edinburgh had generously agreed to be the Society's President for a term of 6 years; the Duke visited the site in July 1987. October 1987 saw the ferry boat 'Saxon' rendered unserviceable in the Hurricane, an event which also demolished one of the site caravans in Top Hat Wood.

Since then there have been various changes in personnel within the Society, but the Society has continued to gain in strength and expertise. Through fund-raising (from subscriptions, entrance fees, and occasional battles put on by the Dark Age Society) we have been able to provide all sorts of equipment for the Project. The list includes wheelbarrows and trowels, kitchen equipment, a marquee, generators, fencing, an electronic balance, and various Peter Berry inventions — such as the sieve and sprinkler.

#### THE FUTURE

While the excavations continue the Society will still have the obviously important role to play in fund-raising, publicity and guiding. When the Trust's activities start winding down the Society's role will change and new goals will have to be achieved.

Although a large piece of the site will have been excavated by 1992 there will still be much left untouched. The idea of a Field School (Saxon II) has been shelved, so the unexcavated areas of the site will still need some attention — the threat of treasure-hunters on the site is ever-present. The public will continue to walk down the footpath to the site, and will in the aftermath of the Research Project expect rather more information than is given by the old Ministry of Works sign by the gate. Thus at a minimum the site must be mown and accessible information boards be provided, which would still honour the fact that the site itself is private land, and a cemetery.

The Society funded the exhibition which is now on the site. To have a permanent exhibition on this lonely and unguarded site might be difficult. Whether it should be attempted depends on whether there is still a demand for guided tours, on a regular or periodic basis, after the excavations have finished. One alternative is to install outdoor display boards rather like those found in Suffolk County Council picnic areas, or an all-weather display in an open shelter. The other alternative is to have a museum or exhibition at a nearby location. Renting the ground floor of the Woodbridge Tide Mill Granary seems a feasible solution.

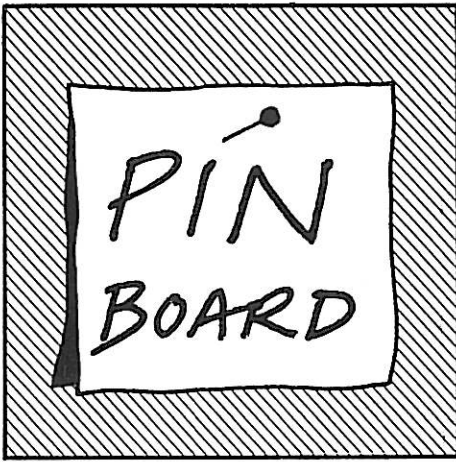
The Society has been organized to raise funds and has proved very successful at it. In the past the income produced from tours and sales went back into the Research Project, but future revenue could be used to set up an exhibition centre. A centre on a prime tourist site like the Granary would, in the long run, support itself.

This type of scheme was originally envisaged by Martin Carver when he put forward the proposal that the Research Project should culminate in the establishment of an Anglo-Saxon Heritage Centre. Such a centre, on the lines of the Skuldelev ship museum in Denmark, would cover the whole fifty years of archaeological activity at Sutton Hoo and the Kingdom of East Anglia. The Granary is near the River Deben, but was not flooded in the 1953 Flood, the highest tide in modern times. However the Society display would not include irreplaceable material, it would be a professional display capable of capturing the public imagination. Ideally it would be done with the cooperation of local museums.

Whatever happens, a positive view of the future will be taken. The site's safety after 1992 is a matter of concern, but there are clear goals ahead for the Society. The Sutton Hoo Anglo-Saxon ship burial will figure in the minds of visitors and locals alike for generations, and this Society aims to make it possible for them to understand it.

#### MR JOHN ALDRIDGE

It is with great sadness that we report the sudden and tragic death of John Aldridge, which occurred when the powered glider he was piloting crashed after take-off at Rattlesden airfield in Suffolk. John had held the post of Hon. Treasurer ever since the inaugural meeting of the Society in the summer of 1984. Always friendly, he served with calm efficiency, and was conscientious and thorough in his management of the Society's finances. Larry Gatter represented the Society at his funeral, which was held at the Suffolk Crematorium in Bury St Edmunds on 30th March. Our thoughts are with his family — his wife Janice and their children, Martin and Michelle. We shall all miss him very much.



## DIARY

### EXCAVATION SEASON

The 1990 excavation season will run from 2 July to 21 September. A team of 30-40 archaeologists, students and volunteers will be at work on site, and three training sessions will take place.

### SUTTON HOO: OPENING TIMES

There will be guided tours of the site on weekend afternoons at 2.00 and 3.00pm, from Easter to late September. Don't forget, Society members can join the tours free of charge (show your membership card).

### SUTTON HOO SOCIETY MEMBERS' OPEN DAY

Society members are invited to view the excavations at Sutton Hoo on **Sunday 16 September 1990 at 11.30am**. A ploughman's lunch will be served at 1.00pm, after a tour of the excavations led by Professor Carver. Sutton Hoo is fairly exposed, so please come prepared with warm clothing, waterproofs and sensible shoes — unless we are in the middle of a heatwave.

### VISIT THE EXCAVATIONS AT SNAPE

The Committee is hoping to arrange a trip to Snape Anglo-Saxon cemetery one Sunday during August. William Filmer-Sankey (Director) will show members round the current excavations. If you would like to join the party, please contact Clare Foss through the Society address (see below).

### WEST STOW TRIP

Arrangements are being made for a trip to West Stow Anglo-Saxon village one weekend in early October. There will be a guided tour of the village, and transport can be laid on

provided there are enough subscribers. If you would like to go, please contact Pearl Simper at Sluice Cottage, Ramsholt, Woodbridge.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Project Team would like to thank the Society for donating a large tarpaulin, a plan-hanger cabinet and shelving for the Archive, scaffolding to extend the photographic towers, kitchen equipment and a Honda water-pump; also for financing the construction of a second site irrigator (designed and built by Peter Berry). As this impressive list shows, the Society's support is vital to the success of each season, and the team are glad of this opportunity to show their appreciation. Our thanks go to Glenys Wade of Ipswich for the archaeological cartoon. Members are reminded once again that the editorial team would be delighted to receive humorous material from members for this slot (we still haven't had any!).

## APPEALS

**VOLUNTEERS** are always welcome and can help the Committee and Project staff in a variety of ways. If you are interested in becoming a guide, please contact Larry Gatter via the Society (address below). Anyone who would like to offer more practical help (with mass-mailing, footpath clearing, building maintenance, site maintenance, or as a volunteer digger) should contact Jenny Glazebrook (Woodbridge 7673). Get involved, keep fit, and contribute to a major research project all in one go!

## OVERSEAS MEMBERS

Due to the high cost of processing cheques drawn on foreign banks, we would like to ask overseas members to pay their subscriptions by international money order in future. This will of course ensure that your contributions are of maximum benefit to the Society.

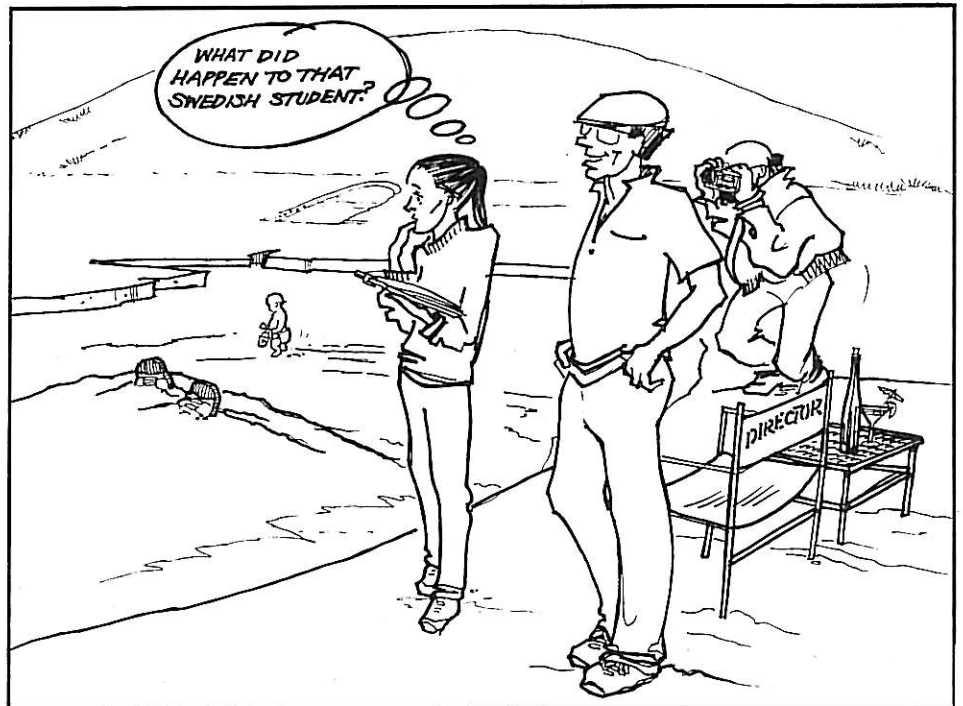
## BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENT

We are delighted to congratulate Martin Carver and his wife Madeleine on the arrival of twin boys, born on 23rd March. The twins will be named Jacques and Louis, and will be spending their first summer at Sutton Hoo along with older brother Freddie and sister Gevi.

**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).

## SALES

**BULLETIN No 7 DUE OUT APRIL 1990 . . .** Interim report on the 1989 excavation season to be included. You can ensure you receive each new edition as it is published, by joining the **Bulletin** mailing list. For details, contact Jenny Glazebrook at the site office (address below).



### Contact Addresses:

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The Sutton Hoo Society, c/o NatWest Bank plc, Cumberland Street, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 1JD

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