

SAXON

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SUTTON HOO SOCIETY

Dear Member,

The 1985 Season is rapidly approaching and two aspects in particular excite our imagination. There will be the fascinating and rewarding task of presenting the site to the many visitors and experiencing their enthusiasm and interest. There will be, in addition, the intense interest created by the arrival of the professional archaeologists and the continuation of excavations.

The use of the new hut will make much easier the role of the guides this year. Tickets can be distributed and souvenirs attractively displayed. The unique charm of the B.U.F.A.U. green Marina will not be missed I fear.

A number of new guides have offered their services and a training session was organised on site in March. Martin Carver conducted probably the shortest guided tour in our history.....in a blustering rain storm! We sheltered in the British Museum hut with mugs of hot tea to recover morale. If you wish to become a guide do send me your name as we are hoping to arrange a second training session.

If you wish to assist with visitors but feel you cannot be a guide, why not volunteer to be a hut-minder and distribute tickets and sell souvenirs? Let me know.

We are open on weekends from early May to late October. Guided tours commence at 2.00 p.m. and 4.00 p.m. and in addition a busy programme of group visits is being arranged. Archaeological groups and other allied societies seem anxious to review progress to date. We are looking forward to welcoming them.

What will there be to see? In August and September the archaeologists will be at work and the very least we can anticipate is a further collection of 'sandmen', which caused such interest last year.

From May to August and again in October, when excavations will not be in progress there will still be more to see than the bare barrows. An impressive photographic display has been brought together and will be an essential part of every tour. It will be situated in one of the portacabins on site.

As we go to press there is still a little uncertainty regarding car parking facilities and access routes to the site and also the viability of paths from the ferry. Let us hope these problems will be solved before the season commences. We look forward to seeing you and thank you for your continued interest.

Mike Weaver
Hon. Secretary
Sutton Hoo Society

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT

Since last reporting, we have increased our numbers to 221 with considerable interest coming from the United States.

Around 65 members attended our first coffee evening in February when Martin Carver gave an extremely interesting lecture accompanied by slides. The ensuing coffee break gave us a chance to meet one another and produced enthusiastic volunteers for various tasks.

Our next enterprise is a coach trip to the British Museum on 20th April where Angela Evans will give us a specially conducted tour of the Sutton Hoo Treasures (sorry! fully subscribed!).

Hopefully, we shall see as many members as possible (on 22nd September) when Martin Carver will give an up-to-date report on the season's work followed by a site tour.

Liz Miles,
Two Barns,
Eyke, Woodbridge,
Suffolk.

Tel: Eyke 287

THE CURSE OF RAEDWALD

All the best archaeological excavations, especially the prestigious, are punctuated by catastrophe, and the 1984 season at Sutton Hoo was no exception. Above the ground, under the ground, on the ground and in it, things contrived to go wrong, usually before a hastily gathered but enthusiastic audience. Few activities this summer diverted the project's director so earnestly as the camera - kite, otherwise known as the Dunsford Flying Machine, purchased from a firm of that name in Oxfordshire. Assuming that the necessary settings and black tapings of the camera and servo were done correctly, which was rare, the photographs taken were usually of the intended target (i.e. the site) rather than Woodbridge, a passing American A10 airplane or magnificent cloud effects over the Deben. The flying performance was, however, somewhat variable, depending as it does on the wind. When light, this had to be created artificially by running backwards over grid-pegs, anti-glider ditches and barrows, not an easy thing to do even for a qualified archaeologist, particularly when the two strings succeeded, as on one occasion, in lassooing the greater part of a BBC camera team. More perilous still, are the occasions when the wind is strong, as Ira Block, a cameraman commissioned to photograph Sutton Hoo for the National Geographic Society discovered on his visit. The kite rose like a rocket, but before transporting itself and the project director bodily into American airspace the strings (breaking strain = 100 lbs.) fortunately snapped. Kite, camera, servo and two hundred metres of string then departed over the power wires and Mrs. Tranmer's garden before coming to earth 3 miles away in a field of barley. Ira Block found the spectacle to be "good copy" although it is unclear what part the episode will play in the National Geographic's "History of Archaeology Excavation".

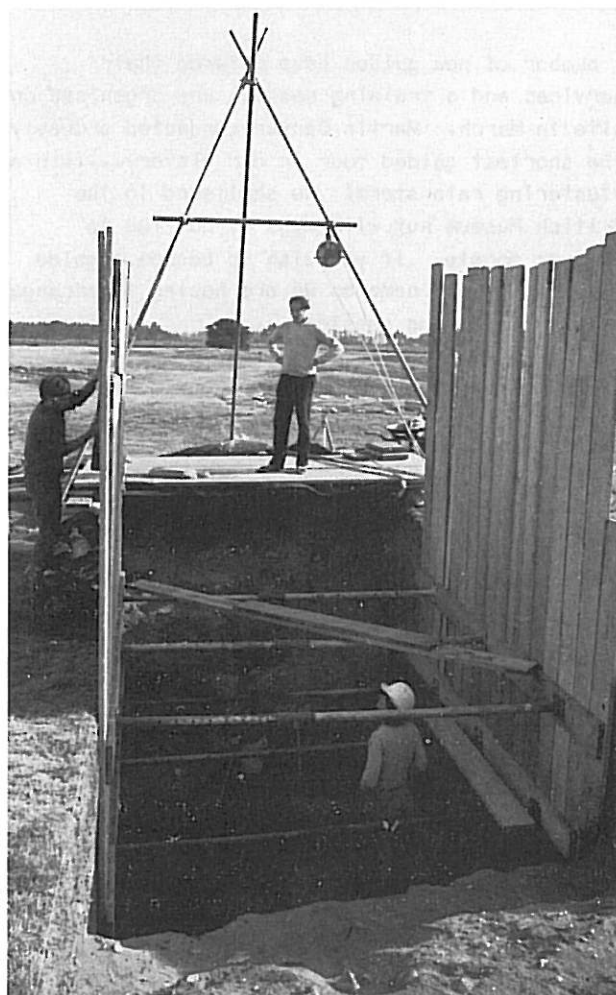
Technically, the re-opening of Mound 2 was a most challenging operation, requiring a descent of 18 feet in soft sand. Hydraulically operated shoring equipment was anticipated from a sponsor, but failed to materialise, and on the day of Mound 2's scheduled opening a complete system had to be invented from scratch. It was thanks to Peter Berry who built the adjustable timber revetment, that the excavation was possible at all. It certainly wasn't his fault that the directorial hand was wound between two planks by a premature tightening of the screw jacks, or that a premature loosening of the fully developed shoring caused 12 barrow loads of loose gravel to cascade onto the burial chamber to the chagrin of Gillian Hutchinson and Angela Evans, Mound 2's careful and courageous excavators. Basil Brown's trench in Mound 2 collapsed at least twice, as his diary tells us; barrow make-up must be treated with the greatest respect. Replaced in timber, Peter Berry's 1984 shoring has remained safely intact through the winter.

Undoubtedly it was the night work which tempted fate more than any other operation. The appalling racket and smell produced by the generators was fortunately relieved intermittently by their failure, plunging the strange tableau into darkness. It is not easy to know what to do, if, kneeling trowel in hand in a narrow trench at one o'clock in the morning, you can no longer see. Some people's reaction was to sing, which is what birds in woods do in similar circumstances. Others to swear just for the relief of being heard. After the first session, Peter Leach, the project's senior supervisor, was moved to suggest that we should continue to consider working by day as a serious alternative. Amongst the techniques pioneered on these night occasions was photography by oblique lighting, in which the BBC have played an outstanding part, and the use of ultraviolet photography for bodies, which owes most to Edward Morgan.

These were successes, but it has to be reported that there is undeniable evidence that night work makes you very tired, and U/V light makes you rather sick.

FURSA.

Timber shoring to Mound 2 under construction.



AN UNUSUAL OCCUPATION

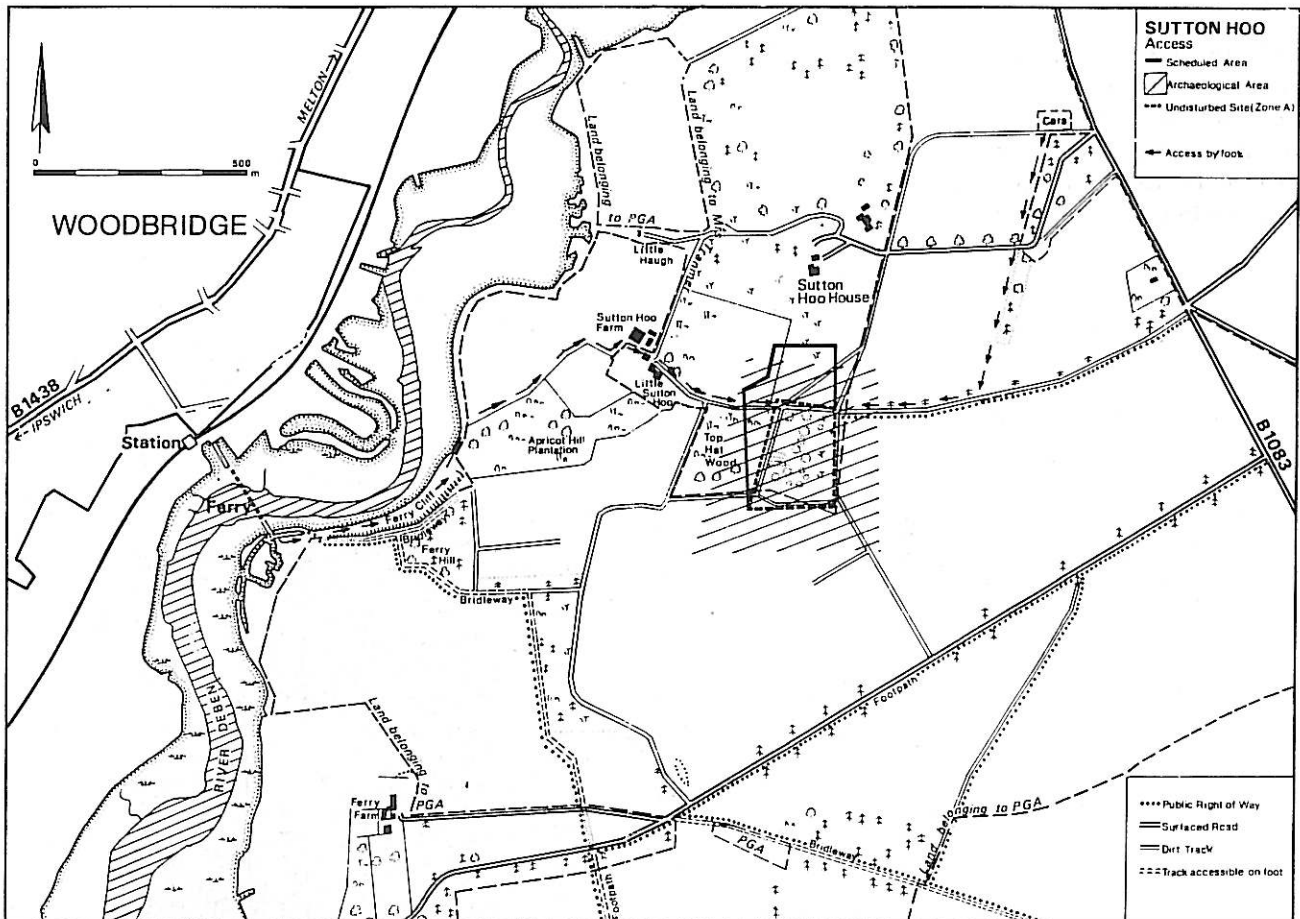
On a cold winter's night, with mist swirling around the mounds and a full moon shining, an Anglo-Saxon cemetery is perhaps not the place most people would choose to go to sleep. Fortunately our "neighbours", whoever they may be, never caused us any sleepless nights, which is just as well, since Sutton Hoo has been our home for the last eighteen months. In fact, the site is remarkably quiet and peaceful, as those who have visited us will know.

With a cold water pipe and a telephone as our only luxuries, living at Sutton Hoo has been a challenge, and after two winters with heavy falls of snow we are now quite adept at surviving the cold. When our water supply was frozen for weeks, and our emergency rations were exhausted, we had to melt snow in a saucepan to make tea. Our gas bottles froze, and when they too ran out, we built a sledge from an upturned British Museum bench and car tow ropes, dragging the gas bottles along the snow to a very surprised delivery man. Tea froze in the teapot, our toilet froze over, and even the telephone dial froze. This winter we even had to dig our way through a snow drift to go to and from the site. We coped remarkably well, due largely to support from our friends in Woodbridge, who provided us with hot showers, home-made cakes and wonderful dinners, and to them we are very grateful.



Winter 1984 at Sutton Hoo.

Cathy Royle Andy Copp
Custodians



The Sutton Hoo area, showing sites of proposed development

FERRY ACROSS THE DEBEN

Last winter I was lent a little "Borough" guide book to Woodbridge which had a reference to the century old ferry service. At a guess I would say that this guide was published in about 1905 and it is at pains to stress that Woodbridge was a perfect place for a "restful holiday", so there is nothing new about encouraging tourism.

The ferry was running from the "Quay by the railway station" and the return fare to Sutton was 2d. This was the route which the ferry had been moved to in 1874 when the present hards were built. Before that it ran from in front of the Tide Mill, a route it probably took in the medieval period long before Wilford Bridge was first built.

In the Edwardian era the ferry was a vital link in preserving the town's all important respectability because "the bathing place for men is on the Sutton side of the river and is reached by turning to the left from the Ferry landing place". While the men were swimming and exposing a limited area of naked flesh under the Sutton Ferry Cliff, the "Ladies were provided for at the Lime Quay Swimming Baths" on the Woodbridge side. The good people of Woodbridge, in the halcyon days before the Great War, did not indulge in anything as risky as mixed bathing.

Fortunately in the many difficulties to be overcome in re-opening the ferry service there were no worries about preserving proper proprieties; safety is a far more important factor. Our reason for re-starting the ferry is to provide an interesting way of visiting the Sutton Hoo Ship Burial site. Like the Sutton Hoo ship, our ferry boat's origin is obscure and it also has links with Scandinavia, for it is a Norwegian built Rana boat, bought secondhand from Andy Seedhouse.

From his quayside premises the boat was moved to Frank Knights Boatyard where it was adapted for carrying eight passengers and a ferryman.

This first season is very much a trial period to see when the greatest demand will be. Roger Edmunds, a former barge skipper and mate in Everards coaster, has agreed to be ferryman. He will run the ferry at weekends and public holidays and possibly carry parties across in weekdays. These parties would have to be arranged beforehand with Roger who lives on the houseboat Mary Ann in the Ferry Dock, Woodbridge.

The Suffolk Coastal District Council have been most helpful. They own the right to operate the ferry but are allowing us to run it. They have also agreed to repair the landing hards.

The Ferry Service will be opened on Saturday, May 4th at 11.00 a.m. and for those who wish to see it start the motto is "Use it or Lose it", it will have to pay its way (25p each way) from that day on.

Robert Simper

