

# Village Guide

an introduction to West Stow  
Anglo-Saxon Village

With

Odd

a Saxon boy!



*St Edmundsbury*  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# WEST STOW

West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village Trust



Skeletons and objects were found on the site of the nearby cemetery in about 1850. Archaeologists discovered this early Anglo-Saxon settlement and excavated it between 1965 and 1972; 69 houses, 7 halls and 7 other structures were found.

# Anglo-Saxons



The Angles and the Saxons were just two of the groups of pagan warrior-farmers who crossed the North Sea, looking for new land in Britain, a land left behind by the Romans. They travelled up the river valleys and came to West Stow around 420AD.

This village continued until about 650AD, when it was gradually abandoned.

There were two or three groups of houses on the hill. Each group housed an extended family. Life was hard, especially for slaves. They were buried in the cemetery, with objects for the next world.



These people grew crops, raised pigs, sheep and cattle. They hunted and fished. They made clothes, pottery, wooden and metal items and traded for things they could not make.



## Information Point

The Information Point provides some basic information about the site and the Anglo-Saxon people who once lived here. It is not meant to be a reconstruction of any original building.

THE ROMANS WERE STRANGE PEOPLE WHO BUILT STRANGE PLACES TO LIVE IN. WE ARE VERY DIFFERENT PEOPLE, WE LOVE THE LAND AND MAKE THE BEST USE OF IT.







The sunken house (1976) shows the old idea of the Anglo-Saxons living in the pit. It does not match the clues found here, so we do not think it is correct.

# Reconstruction

We have tried to use the tools and techniques available to the Anglo-Saxon builders. Oak trees are split with wedges and shaped into planks and beams with an axe. To test out ideas every reconstruction is different. The buildings are reconstructed on the sites of the originals.



The Anglo-Saxons used the pole-lathe to make wooden cups, bowls, furniture and tool handles.

YOUR RECONSTRUCTIONS ARE NOT AS GOOD AS OUR HOUSES, BUT I SUPPOSE YOU HAVEN'T HAD AS MUCH PRACTICE AS WE HAVE!

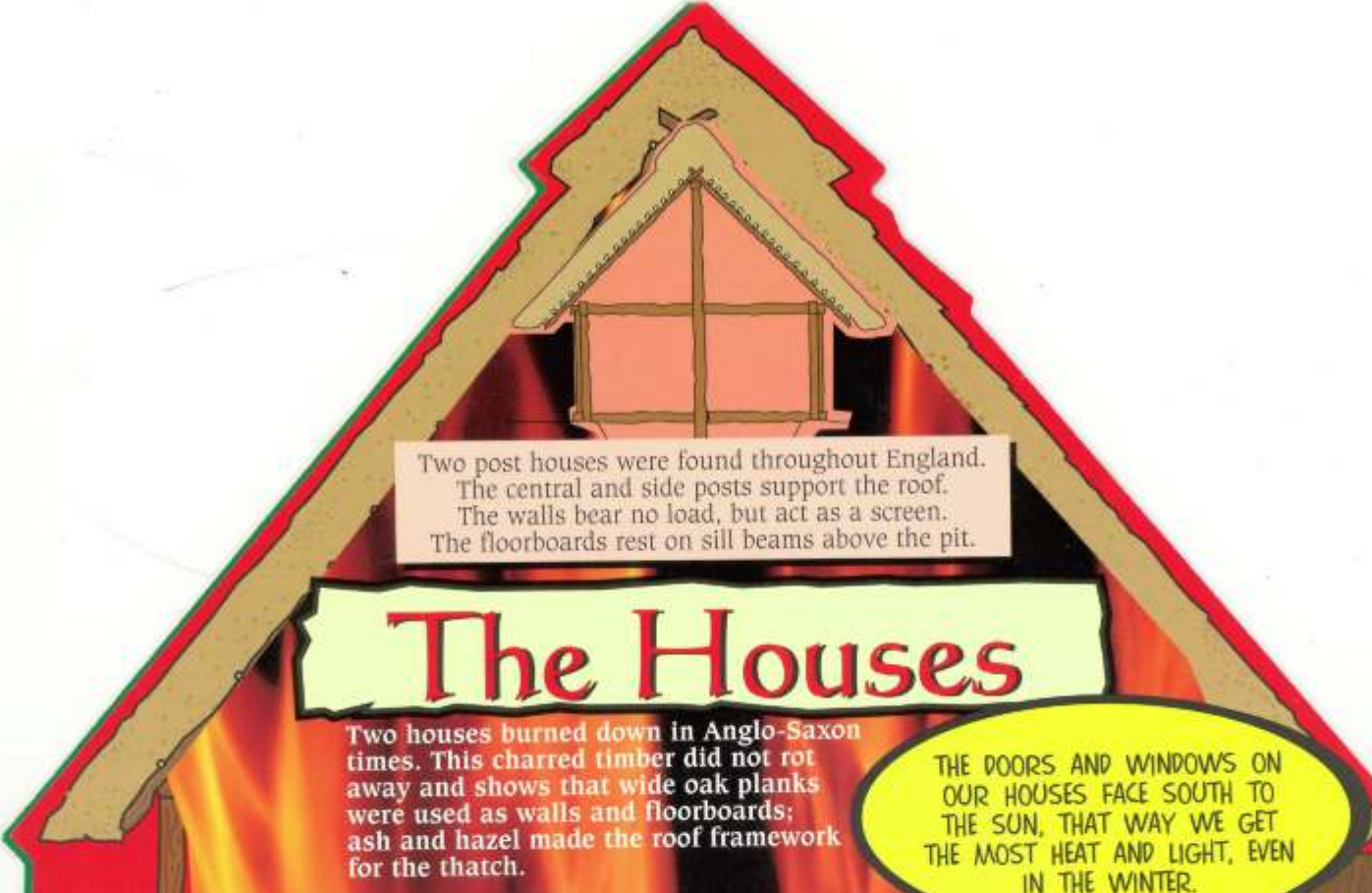


## Oldest House



The oldest house was built with the simplest technology in 1974. It tests the basic idea of a living floor above the pit and the roof is supported by the six posts, not the walls. It has been standing for 25 years!





Two post houses were found throughout England. The central and side posts support the roof. The walls bear no load, but act as a screen. The floorboards rest on sill beams above the pit.

# The Houses

Two houses burned down in Anglo-Saxon times. This charred timber did not rot away and shows that wide oak planks were used as walls and floorboards; ash and hazel made the roof framework for the thatch.

THE DOORS AND WINDOWS ON OUR HOUSES FACE SOUTH TO THE SUN, THAT WAY WE GET THE MOST HEAT AND LIGHT, EVEN IN THE WINTER.



The Weaving House (1984) is a two post house. It has been fitted out with looms as a weaving shed, to show the evidence from one of the burned houses.



The Living House (1987) is a six post house. The Friends of West Stow Anglo-Saxon Settlement provided funding to present ideas about the furniture and layout of those houses used as family homes.



## The Farmer's House

The Farmer's House (1996) is a six post house with a wood-lined pit. (found in a couple of sites at West Stow). Later buildings from other sites (e.g. Ipswich) have evidence for cellars with external steps, under raised floors.

The pit and post holes are often all that survives of the original building. Six-post houses were only found in East Anglia.







There is evidence for hearths. Smoke would escape through the thatch; a hole in the roof is unlikely. Smoke also preserved any fish or meat stored in the roof space.

## Inside the Houses

Perhaps the houses had different uses. The newest houses may have been for domestic use, while older houses were better as workshops.

Two types of Anglo-Saxon buildings were found here. Around 70 shallow pits, with post holes at either end, were found in groups. These smaller units we have called Houses.

THE PITS BELOW OUR HOUSES MEAN THAT WE CAN LIVE ON WARM, DRY FLOORBOARDS. THEY HELP KEEP US WARM IN WINTER AND COOL IN SUMMER.

The old idea of Anglo-Saxons living in the pits is questioned at West Stow. We suggest that the pits lay beneath the wooden floorboards.

The remains of three looms were found in the weaving house. We know the Anglo-Saxons had other furniture, like beds, tables and chairs, but none survived at West Stow.







Like the original buildings, the Hall has been repaired. The wooden buttresses give support and help stop the important beams moving.

# The Hall

The hall was the focal point for each family unit of about 6 or 7 houses, a place where villagers could gather for meetings and feasts.

The other type of building was suggested by rectangles of post holes, with gaps for the doorways and a patch of burned sand showing a hearth.



We call these larger structures Halls. Evidence for about 7 of these buildings was found.



The workshop was built in 1991 to meet some present day needs. It has an oak framework with infill of wattle and clay. There is no direct evidence for it at West Stow, but it is based upon actual buildings from the end of this period.

MY GRANDFATHER CAN REMEMBER WHEN WE HAD A BIGGER HALL; THIS HALL IS NOT AS BIG AS SOME, BUT IT IS GOOD ENOUGH FOR ALL OF US TO MEET AT THE SAME TIME.




In the village were two or three 'Family units' of one hall plus six or seven houses for various uses, including sleeping and working.



The Hall was completed in 1980; timbers used were roughly squared by having their soft sapwood removed. The walls support the weight of the roof.







Section through the hall.

# Inside the Hall



WHEN TRAVELLERS COME, WE WELCOME THEM IN THE HALL. THAT IS HOW I FIND OUT ABOUT WHAT GOES ON OUTSIDE OUR VILLAGE. ONE DAY I MIGHT SAVE MY VILLAGE FROM A MONSTER, JUST LIKE BEOWULF DID, THEN THEY WOULD SING SONGS ABOUT ME.

Storytelling, music, feasting and celebrations could have all taken place in the hall. The Beowulf story describes a much larger hall where visiting warriors could sleep, but the families would sleep in their own houses.