

The Saxon House: A Review and Some Parallels

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I. THE HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROBLEM

THE foundation of a new Society affords a convenient opportunity to survey the state of the main problems in its chosen field. One of the most intractable problems in the whole range of early medieval studies concerns the dwellings of the Anglo-Saxons. It is generally agreed that they were of wood and that no example survives above ground. Beyond this the student must rely on incidental references in the literature and on the scanty data provided by excavation. Neither source is satisfactory and the data do not appear to correspond. Indeed the layman, reading the conclusions that might legitimately be drawn from each source, might be pardoned for thinking that they referred to different subjects.

The literary sources are principally concerned with the deeds of kings and chieftains, warriors whose ability to win and hold the allegiance of their followers depended, in large measure, on their wealth and the splendour of their display. The bards who sang their deeds were lavish in praise and one should not expect to find sober factual material in such a source. The Hall of *Heorot*, so vividly pictured in the epic of *Beowulf*, is seen with the eye of a poet. None the less the great wooden hall, however gilded and adorned in the verbal picture, must represent a physical reality, a reality that we may perhaps glimpse in the great timber barns of the later middle ages.¹ *Heorot* does not stand alone; other great halls are dimly seen in the tales, but these passing shadows add nothing in the way of precise detail.

Turning to the archaeological data the picture is very different. The *Survey* prepared by the Council for British Archaeology in 1948 states:

‘The invaders were for the most part in a culturally primitive condition . . . their habitations were so wretchedly flimsy—a rectangular scraping in the ground with wattle walls and thatched roof seems to have been the limit of their known architectural competence—that traces of them have been recognized at only about a dozen places in the whole country.’

The contrast with the literary record is fully recognized by the authors of the *Survey*, who remark that:

‘It is impossible to imagine a man of the type buried in the Taplow barrow having no more adequate domestic amenities in life than those provided by a wattled hut of the Sutton Courtenay model’;

¹ For a convenient summary see R. H. Hodgkin, *A History of the Anglo-Saxons* (3 ed., Oxford, 1952), i. 218-21; cf. the tith barn at Harmondsworth, Middlesex, for the type of structure (*Royal Commission on Historical Monuments: Middlesex* (1937), pp. 61-2). See also Rosemary Cramp, ‘*Beowulf* and Archaeology’, *infra*. pp. 57-77, espec. pp. 68 ff.

and they go on to suggest that there must have been halls like that described in *Beowulf*.² Leeds's summary of the material available in 1936 was equally depressing in its view of the domestic life of the early settlers.³ In the last years Mr. Hope-Taylor's excavations at Yeavinger, Northumberland,⁴ have given substance to the literary picture and it is now possible to appreciate something of the state in which an Anglo-Saxon king could live.

But Yeavinger does not solve the basic problem. Are the 'houses' at Sutton Courtenay and elsewhere—the hovels not unfairly described in the passage just quoted—really typical of the house of the Saxon freeman, the *ceorl* who formed the basic class of the laws?⁵ When this question is asked and the evidence examined, it quickly becomes apparent that the summary rests on a very slight foundation. It rests almost exclusively on Sutton Courtenay, the evidence of which seemed to be confirmed by a number of other discoveries, excavated on a much less extensive scale.⁶

II. SUTTON COURTENAY RECONSIDERED

The Saxon settlement at Sutton Courtenay, Berkshire,⁷ lies on a gravel terrace on the south side of the Thames. The site had been previously occupied during the Bronze Age and there was a plentiful scatter of Romano-British pottery, implying that the area had been cultivated during that period. The occupation was noted by chance in the face of a gravel-pit and reported to the Ashmolean Museum. The remains discovered in the course of commercial gravel-digging were intermittently explored by the late E. T. Leeds between 1921 and 1937.

The three reports published by Leeds make it clear that each 'house' site was examined after discovery by the gravel-diggers. Normally the excavation took place on one or more days, when a part of the 'house' had already been destroyed. The published photographs show cleared sites with the spoil piled along their edges. No attempt was made—in the circumstances no attempt could be made—to strip a large area down to the surface of the gravel. No consistent plan of post-holes, if such existed, could have been recovered by the methods used and therefore no argument *e silentio* can be entertained. This general deduction is borne out by the detailed account of the discovery of a part of such a setting. The passage may be quoted in full:

'House XXII: It was impossible wholly to explore this site before it was cleared away, and, though here included in the list of houses, it probably should be designated as a shed, since it had not the usual sunken floor and no

² Council for British Archaeology, *A Survey and Policy of Field Research*, i (1948), 75-8 and 116-18.

³ E. T. Leeds, *Early Anglo-Saxon Art and Archaeology* (Oxford, 1936), pp. 20-8.

⁴ Communicated to the Society of Antiquaries, 1957; cf. *Antiquity*, XXIII (1949), 211-14, and *infra*, p. 71.

⁵ Cf. Dorothy Whitelock, *The Beginnings of English Society* (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1952), p. 108; her conclusion is that 'it is hardly legitimate to use this evidence (sc. Sutton Courtenay and analogous sites) for the standard of living of the average churl in Christian times.'

⁶ G. C. Dunning (*Trans. Leicesters. Arch. Soc.*, XXVIII (1952), 55-62) gives a bibliography down to 1952.

⁷ *Archaeologia*, LXXIII (1922-3), 147-92; LXXVI (1926-7), 59-80; XCII (1947), 79-94.

large post holes were found. Instead were seven small post holes forming a right angle with five on the north side, spaced at 6, 9, 15 and 20 ft. respectively from the corner hole at the northeast angle, and on the east side two others at $9\frac{1}{2}$ and 15 ft. from the same corner.⁸

An analogous setting south-east of House XIV is shown on the plan, but is not discussed in the report. Settings of post-holes about 2 m. apart are not uncommon in the buildings at Warendorf (see below, pp. 30-3), and these two records at Sutton Courtenay serve to illustrate what must have been lost by the excavator's inability to carry out the work on an adequate scale. To emphasize these facts is no criticism of Leeds, who, at Sutton Courtenay, made an important contribution to Anglo-Saxon archaeology. If criticism is called for it should be directed to the miserably inadequate resources available to scientific British archaeology in the period between the wars.

The settlement revealed at Sutton Courtenay consisted of a single line of 'houses' running east and west (nos. I-IX). A second line, parallel to and south of the first, was postulated on the basis of information supplied by the workmen in respect of sites destroyed before controlled investigations began. The first report refers to the start of a third line, parallel to and north of the first, but subsequent excavations showed only an irregular spacing of the sites in that area. A truer picture is afforded by the final report,⁹ which describes 33 'houses' as forming two sides of a frame. The three chance discoveries to the west of the road (W 1-3) provide a third side—the point is not made in the report—and fill in the outline of the settlement. The space enclosed is about 400 by 300 yards and the distribution of the recorded 'houses' is peripheral; the central area was either destroyed before any records were taken or unexcavated.

Of the 33 'houses' explored, two (nos. XX and W 2) were certainly weaving-sheds (p. 37) with looms, a third was certainly a pottery-workshop (no. XXI). Four more (nos. VI, VII, X and XI) had hearths of curious forms, which suggest industrial rather than domestic use. A number—some 10 or 12—were so damaged by the previous removal of gravel, or from other causes, that no conclusions can be drawn. No single example can certainly be interpreted as a dwelling-house and many can never have been such.

The poverty-stricken nature of the finds also bears out the conclusion that the buildings at Sutton Courtenay were of a specialized and lowly character. The equal-armed brooch of base silver was the only article of luxury recovered; the rest of the furnishings were either specialized, such as the articles connected with weaving, or scraps that would get kicked about the settlement, because they were not worth recovery.

At Sutton Courtenay there is no evidence that the recorded remains are in any way typical of the whole settlement. Leeds did not claim that it was a typical Saxon village. He suggested that the 'houses', which he compared with recent peasant dwellings at Athelney, Somerset, were cots, i.e. the dwellings of the

⁸ *Archaeologia*, XCII, 84.

⁹ *Archaeologia*, XCII, 92; cf. *ibid.*, 80-1.

lowest class of non-servile peasant, as described in late Saxon documents.¹⁰

The only site on a comparable scale that has been recorded in Anglo-Saxon England is at St. Neots, Huntingdonshire, where Mr. C. F. Tebbutt planned eight huts. These date from a later period, beginning apparently in the ninth or tenth century.¹¹ This chronology, indicated by the pottery, is important as it shows that huts of this type are not confined to the pagan period and cannot be explained as a primitive type, discarded as soon as growing wealth allowed the erection of larger houses.

It is probable that some of the parallel sites noted by Leeds in the Oxford region were also extensive, but the detailed accounts published refer to isolated buildings, like those at Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire,¹² and Harston, Leicestershire.¹³

A comparable agglomeration of these sunken huts was found at Ezinga, near Groningen, in Friesland,¹⁴ where the complex was interpreted as intrusive Saxon dwellings of *c.* 600 (layer I c). On this site, a *terp* in the coastal marshland, the distribution of these buildings is again peripheral. The possibility of the contemporary existence of buildings of other types has already been pointed out.¹⁵

III. WARENDORF: A CONTINENTAL SAXON VILLAGE OF *c.* 650-800

A convenient and extensive plan of a continental Saxon village is that afforded by the recent excavations 3 km. west of Warendorf on the Ems, near Münster in Westphalia.¹⁶ The settlement lay on the south bank of the river on a terrace rising some 25 ft. above the valley floor, a location that compares very closely with that of Sutton Courtenay. The objects found show that the site was occupied in the late seventh and eighth centuries and that it represents part of the Saxon advance inland from the coast, replacing the Frankish culture during the second half of the seventh century. Its abandonment is to be associated with the Saxon campaigns of Charlemagne and, in particular, the deportations from the Dreingau recorded in 796. This comparatively short and well-dated occupation gives a particular importance to the settlement at Warendorf.

The excavations covered an area of some 10,000 square metres and brought to light a large number of wooden buildings, of which 75 were completely, and 8 more partially, excavated. Their life must have been short, since three or four successive buildings could in some cases be identified in the same area. Nine types are listed and illustrated in the report. The whole complex forms a village with dwelling-houses of more than one size, barns, stables and the other auxiliary

¹⁰ *Archaeologia*, LXXIII, 185; for the position of the cot and cot-dweller in the late period see White-lock, *op. cit.* in note 5, p. 101. The word does not seem to be attested before the ninth century or, in the specialized sense here discussed, earlier than the second half of the tenth, but the status may have been in existence from a much older period.

¹¹ *Proc. Cambridges. Antiquar. Soc.*, XXXIII (1933), 137-51; for dating see *ibid.*, XXXV (1935), 97-105; cf. *Victoria County History: Cambridgeshire*, I (1938), 328-30.

¹² *Antiq. J.*, XII (1932), 279-93.

¹³ *Op. cit.* in note 6, pp. 49-53.

¹⁴ *Germania*, XX (1936), 42.

¹⁵ O. Tischler in *35 Bericht der Römisch-Germanische Kommission* (1950), p. 137.

¹⁶ *Germania*, XXXII (1954), 189-213.

structures required in an agricultural settlement. Type 5 (FIG. 6) represents the 'pit dwelling' (*grübenhaus*) with which we are familiar at Sutton Courtenay. The author analyses the various types, discussing the different functions of each and suggesting correlations with the various buildings mentioned in the old Germanic



FIG. 5

Warendorf, Germany: part of site-plan of Saxon village, showing two longhouses
(After *Germania*, XXXII, Beilage 4)

codes, such as the *Leges Alamannorum* and the *Leges Baiuariorum*. The whole settlement, illustrating the many buildings required by an early farming community, may be compared with the earlier British site of Little Woodbury, Wiltshire.¹⁷ This was a pre-Roman farm, while Warendorf was a larger community of the seventh and eighth centuries A.D.; both sites emphasize the lesson that farming settlements of this character must be excavated as a whole. It is only when we have

¹⁷ *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, VI (1940), 78-107.

a complete picture of at least one site that it will be possible to interpret the fragmentary data afforded by those imperfectly explored.

Since the present article is concerned only with houses, it will be sufficient

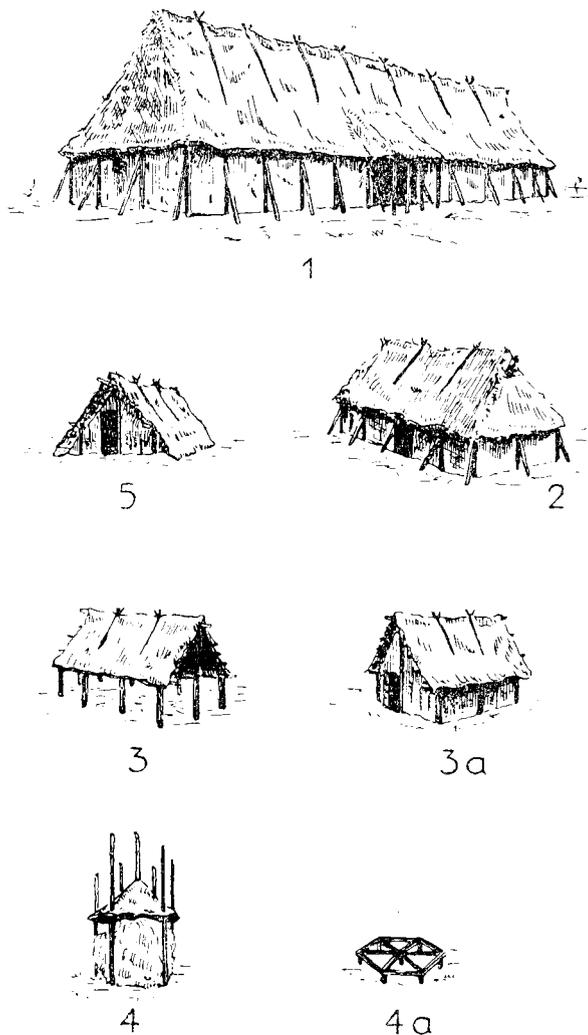


FIG. 6

Warendorf, Germany: reconstructions of different types
of Saxon buildings
(After *Germania*, XXXII, 211)

to consider the principal dwellings at Warendorf. For our purpose the most important are the large longhouses, of which eleven were uncovered. 'The plan of the large buildings', as the excavator states, 'shows a rectangular area, ranging from 14 to 29 metres long by 4.50 to 7 metres wide, outlined by a double row of

posts'. During the occupation of the site, a development in the plan of the individual houses is to be noted. The older buildings show 'a rectangular plan with straight sides and ends, while in the later levels the long sides are bowed outwards, to a greater or lesser extent, so that the width in the centre measures some 60 cm. more than at the ends; in house 6 the figure is 1.20 m., in house 43 as much as about 2.50 m.' The narrow space between the rows of posts and the raking setting of those in the outer line show that the inner posts represent the wall, while the outer row served as supports. In some of these buildings there were entrances with projecting porches near the centre of the long side and a hearth towards one end of the central area. 'While these large buildings with hearth and side porch are certainly dwellings, the others, lacking these features, must be accepted as agricultural buildings (*wirtschaftsgebäude*)' (FIG. 5 and FIG. 6, type 1).

There are smaller buildings following the same patterns as the large longhouses. They vary in length from 4 to 11 m. 'In so far as they include a hearth they must be reckoned as dwelling-houses; otherwise as agricultural buildings' (FIG. 6, type 2).

As has been stated, Warrendorf allows a tentative correlation of the building types with the structures mentioned in the legal texts. The large dwelling must belong to the freeman and the lesser ones to the serfs. Since the plan shows at least six large dwelling-houses, most of them, apparently, in use at the same time, it may be deduced that they were the houses of the ordinary freeman, the social equivalent of the Saxon ceorl.

Similar but less extensive results have been obtained in the excavations of the Frankish village at Haldern near Wesel on the Lower Rhine¹⁸ and at the Bavarian site of Burgheim.¹⁹ In both these settlements we also find the association of large longhouses with smaller buildings and with the tiny 'pit-dwellings' of the type familiar at Sutton Courtenay. The large longhouse appears in more than one variant form, but its size, its appearance alongside smaller buildings of the same type, and its association with the 'pit-dwellings' show that we have to do with a common West-German type of house and that it is the house of the ordinary freeman. Sociologically this equation outweighs minor differences in the house-types.

IV. THE CONTINENTAL VILLAGES OF THE COASTAL MARSHES BY THE NORTH SEA

A variant type of the large longhouse is found in the artificial mounds (*Wurten* and *Terpen*), which represent the contemporary settlements on the marshy shores of the North Sea. Tofting, on the estuary of the Eider, in Holstein, may serve as a typical example,²⁰ lying in an old Saxon area. The normal dwelling from the second to the fifth century A.D. was an aisled longhouse with two rows of substantial posts carrying the roof. The outer walls were of wattlework, against which was piled an external mound of turves or dung. One end of the house, with

¹⁸ *Bonner Jahrb.*, CXLIX (1949), 104-45.

¹⁹ *Germania*, XXIX (1951), 139-41.

²⁰ A. Bantelmann, *Tofting, eine vorgeschichtliche Warft an der Eidermündung* (Offa Bücher, n.f., 12, 1955).

a hearth in the centre, was used as a dwelling, the other as a byre (FIG. 7). The inhabitants of Tofting were farmers, who pastured their cattle on the rich meadows of the flat undyked marshland fringing the estuary; they also practised agriculture.

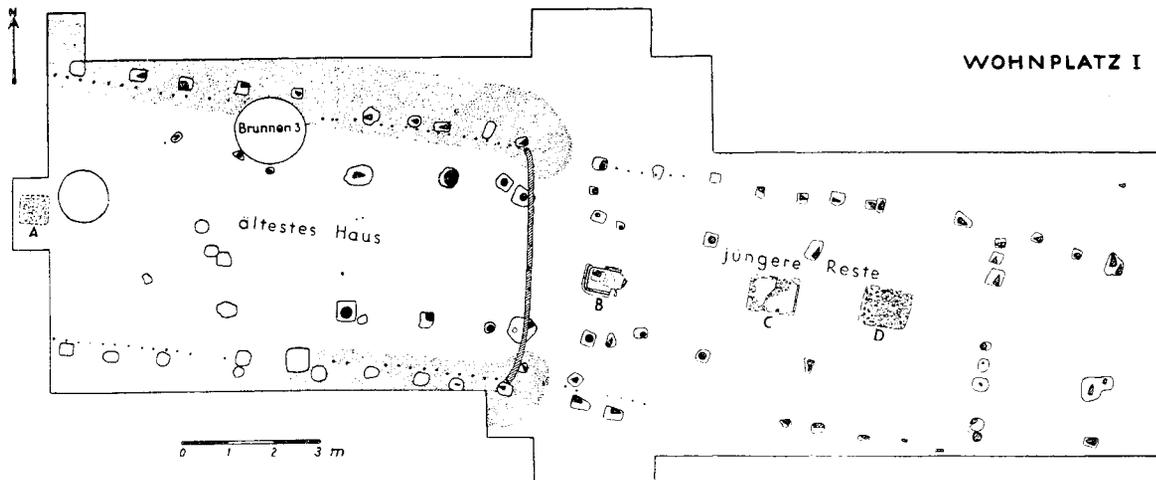


FIG. 7

Tofting, Germany: plan of house 1
(After A. Bantelmann, *Tofting*, fig. 38)

At the Federsen Wierde, a similar settlement also in the old Saxon area, on the estuary of the Weser, near Bremerhaven,²¹ the same type of longhouse occurs in a series of settlements, which succeeded each other in the course of the first

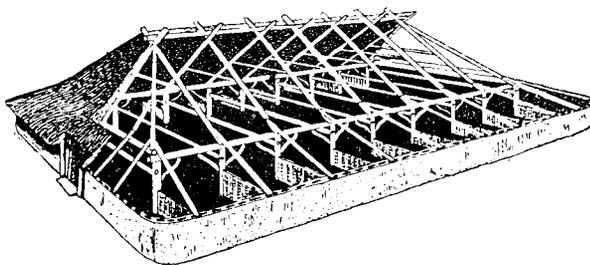


FIG. 8

Hessen, Germany: reconstruction of house
(After 35 *Bericht d. Röm.-Germ. Kommission*, 125)

five centuries of our era. Similar houses have also been identified in a number of these marsh settlements in the Saxon and Friesian areas on the coasts of the North Sea. At Hessen the houses varied from 12 to 18 m. long by 5.5 to 6.5 m. wide (FIG. 8).²² A more developed example, uncovered on the Krummer Weg, near

²¹ *Germania*, XXXIV (1956), 125-41.

²² *Germania*, XXIX (1951), 223-5.

Wilhelmshafen, dated from the eleventh-twelfth centuries and illustrates the transition from these houses to those of the full middle ages.²³

The economy of these marsh settlements is clearly specialized, but the occurrence of the same type of house, even though there are differences between the individual examples, marks these dwellings as those of the basic free class, the social equivalent of the Saxon ceorl.

V. THE MAIN HOUSE TYPE

The rectangular hall-houses of Warendorf and the aisled longhouses of the marsh settlements, like Tofting, represent variant developments of the same tradition; the exact form adopted will have been determined by the ecology of the individual settlement and its farming traditions. As social units they fall into the same class, contrasted on the one hand with the great Celtic farms, represented by round houses as diverse as the aisled dwelling at Little Woodbury, Wiltshire,²⁴ and the crannog in Milton Loch, Kirkcudbrightshire,²⁵ and on the other by the classically inspired Roman villa.²⁶ They are a typically West-Germanic expression of the social and cultural needs of a farming community. It must be assumed that the Anglo-Saxon invaders of Britain brought this tradition with them and that on arrival in England they would have expressed these needs in a comparable form. This is the importance for English archaeology of the settlement at Warendorf, which also represents Saxon penetration into an area of rather higher culture, but at a date some two centuries after the landings in Britain. The hypothesis is confirmed by the appearance in Britain of the most easily recognizable component of the West-Germanic complex, the small 'pit-dwelling'.²⁷ In the present context the difference between hall-house and aisled longhouse and the variants within each of these forms are not important; had this review extended to Denmark and Norway further variants would have been recorded without altering the essential picture.

These great rectangular houses have a long ancestry on the continent. They are common in the Roman age in the coastlines south and east of the North Sea and examples have been recorded as early as the late-Hallstatt period.²⁸

One further point deserves notice in the present connexion. The bowed plan of the later examples at Warendorf is compared by the excavator with the boat-shaped buildings at Trelleborg.²⁹ These in turn are related to farms of the earliest Norse colonial period in both Iceland and Orkney and Shetland. Here again, introduced into the British Isles by a Germanic people along an entirely different route, we see the great hall-house established as the normal dwelling type of the

²³ *Probleme der Küstenforschung im südliche Nordseegebiet*, III (1942), 35; cf. *op. cit.* in note 15, p. 132.

²⁴ *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, VI, 78-92.

²⁵ *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*, LXXXVII (1955), 134-52.

²⁶ The basilican house is an exception, representing the romanization of the native type.

²⁷ 'Pit-dwellings' occur on some (e.g. Ezinga), but not all, of the specialized marsh settlements of the coastland.

²⁸ An admirable summary of the evidence is provided by O. Tischler, *op. cit.* in note 15, pp. 124-46.

²⁹ *Germania*, XXXII, 204-8.

basic free class. Jarlshof in Shetland shows that the type was already in existence in Norse lands in the ninth century.³⁰

VI. THE DWELLING HOUSES OF ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

In the face of this cumulative evidence it can scarcely be doubted that the dwelling of the Saxon ceorl belonged to the same great family and that we must look for a rectangular building with an area of some 40-60 ft. by 12-15 feet. There were doubtless variations in size and in arrangement, corresponding in part to the type of farming and in part, perhaps, to the racial and political affinities of the different peoples. These differences will be a matter for study, when examples of the basic type have been located and excavated. More important, allowance must be made for differences reflecting the various social classes.

The highest level of society, the royal palace, is now being elucidated by Mr. Hope-Taylor at Yeavinger. This is as far as we can go in England. But the matter may be further illustrated from the Norse area in the far north. On the Brough of Birsay, in Orkney,³¹ a series of farms like those at Jarlshof (*supra*) have been located and planned. Of two adjacent examples, perhaps the oldest on the site and dating from the ninth century, the larger measured 56 ft. by a maximum of 15 ft., the long sides having the bowed outline to which reference has previously been made. On the cliff edge, overlying a typical farm and, in turn, overlaid by a great centrally-planned dwelling of the mid-eleventh century, was a far larger longhouse, some 25 ft. wide and over 80 ft. long; the further end has been eroded by the sea. The same larger type has also been identified on the island of Rousay, where the building is over 100 ft. long. The site on Rousay is connected with the twelfth-century saga chieftain, Sigurd of Westness; it can scarcely be doubted that the building was his ancestral hall. Similarly the history of Birsay shows that the eroded hall on the edge of the cliff was the seat of the tenth-century earls of Orkney, replaced about 1050 by the more elaborately planned dwelling of Earl Thorfinn the Mighty. The difference is not merely one of size. The normal farmhouse in the islands differs from these great halls in its internal arrangement, and it may be suggested that they were larger in order to accommodate the followers of the warrior and provide space for the feasting that plays so great a part in the literary record.

At the other end of the social scale the laws indicate a number of classes, semi-free or unfree, of lower standing than the ceorl. The legal texts, which are the main source of information, are chiefly concerned with the personal worth of these classes, which vary from kingdom to kingdom. This is illustrated by the discovery of larger and smaller dwelling-houses on the site at Warendorf (p. 33) and on other sites. This again affords the model which we must assume for Saxon England and of which we must look for examples.

VII. THE 'PIT-DWELLINGS'

The English evidence alone was sufficient to suggest that some, if not all, of the 'pit-dwellings' at Sutton Courtenay and elsewhere served specialized functions.

³⁰ J. R. C. Hamilton, *Excavations at Jarlshof, Shetland* (Edinburgh, 1956), pp. 102-9 and 129-30.

³¹ Ministry of Works: Official Guide (in press). A plan of two of these houses is published in *Forntida Gårdar i Island* (1943), fig. 138.

The same conclusion has been reached from the survey and analysis of the more extensive continental material.³² The evidence need not be repeated in detail; it will suffice to indicate some of the uses for which we can point to evidence from English sites.

The most obvious example of this specialized use is the weaving-shed. Except that weaving was a woman's task, there is little positive evidence from England bearing on the conditions under which it was carried out. The continental codes are clearer. The *Leges Alamannorum* lay down fines for the violation of women from the weaving-shed. 'If anyone sleep for the first time with a maiden from the weaving-shed let him compound (with her master) for 6 shillings.' This is a Carolingian text, but the essential features are in the pre-Carolingian laws.³³ The word translated weaving-shed is *genicium*, a transparent disguise of the late Latin *gynaecium*, explained by Isidore of Seville as a derivation from the Greek γυνή, 'because there a group of women comes together to carry out the work of making cloth'.³⁴ In some codices the word is glossed *textrinum*, a classical Latin word for the weaving-shed, which is already used by Cicero. The form of the Alamannic law shows that the maiden or servant—both terms occur—was subject to a freeman; it further suggests that the women may have slept in the shed. The two 'houses' at Sutton Courtenay (nos. XX and W.2) and the hut at Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire,³⁵ to go no further, fall into place in the picture painted by these laws.³⁶

Other industrial uses are suggested by the curiously shaped hearths and the slag and scoriae in houses such as no. VI at Sutton Courtenay, while the unused clay in nos. VII and XXI suggested to the excavator that they had been used for the manufacture of the circular clay loom-weights and pottery respectively.

Guyan in the analysis already referred to³⁷ suggests that some of these 'pit-dwellings' were used for cooking and baking, a function which was suggested for a number of the houses at Sutton Courtenay, though the point was not considered whether they were specialized buildings for these purposes or whether the work was carried on alongside the other normal activities of an ordinary dwelling. The former seems the more likely, when we consider the traditional medieval location of the kitchen outside the main house. At Jarlshof, one of the oldest Viking farms shows a separate kitchen with oven at one end of the building, away from the main hearth, though in this case under the same roof.³⁸

The attribution of specialized functions to these 'pit-dwellings' does not necessarily exclude the possibility that they were sometimes used for residence. It must be confessed that a critical re-examination of the evidence from Sutton

³² *Jahrbuch der schweizerische Gesellschaft für Urgeschichte*, 1952, pp. 174-97; *Bonner Jahrb.*, CXLIX, 136-41.

³³ *Mon. Germ. Hist.*, *Leges III*, 161, Caput lxxx; cf. *Lex secunda*, lxxxii and *Lantfrid*, lxxiv.

³⁴ *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Originum Liber XV*, 6.

³⁵ *Antiq. J.*, XII (1932), 184-7.

³⁶ For the sunken character of these weaving-sheds, cf. *Plinii Historia naturalis*, 19, 9: 'in Germany they carry out that work in sunken sheds (*defossi*) or beneath the ground', a passage already cited by Leeds in this connexion.

³⁷ See n. 32.

³⁸ Hamilton, *op. cit.* in note 30, p. 109.

Courtenay lends little support to such an hypothesis (p. 29). But there is the more modern parallel of the cottages at Athelney, Somerset,³⁹ originally suggested by Leeds, whose proposal to regard the settlement as a series of cots, belonging to the lowest class of Saxon labourer cannot be entirely rejected. As a further parallel to the long survival of this very humble type of house we may cite the mid-nineteenth century record of a Friesian peasant house, published by van Giffen,⁴⁰ as an illustration to the huts at Ezinga.

VIII. THE EVIDENCE OF THE CEMETERIES

Late Saxon society, as reflected in pre-conquest documents and, above all, in Domesday Book, shows an elaborate system of classes. We should expect this to be reflected in their houses, and the continental evidence already cited lends support to this hypothesis. There is also the evidence of the cemeteries, reaching back to the fifth century. Describing the arrangement of the Alamannic cemetery at Holzgerling in Swabia, Veeck writes:

‘Beside or near to the richly-furnished grave of the weapon-bearing head of the family, we usually found a richly-furnished woman’s grave, then poorer graves round about, both of men and women, set in small clusters. These are the burials of his household, beside that of his wife, those of his children, of his unmarried and widowed sisters and of his servants.’⁴¹

This is typical of a number of continental cemeteries that have been carefully explored.⁴²

The social stratification and the cohesion shown in the cemeteries must also have been reflected in the life of the people. For this reason, again, the idea of the small ‘pit-dwellings’ as normal houses must be given up, and replaced by the picture of the wooden longhouse with its ancillary buildings. Only houses on this scale fit the picture of the Anglo-Saxon ceorl, the social equivalent of the continental freeman that we have been considering, the peasant farmer tilling his hide (*terra unius familiae*, the land of one household) of some 120 acres of arable with pasture and other common rights.

³⁹ *Proc. Somerset Archaeol. Soc.*, LV (1910), 175-80.

⁴⁰ *Negende en Tiende Jaarverslag van de Vereeniging voor Terpenonderzoek* (1926), pp. 25-6, figs. 18-19.

⁴¹ *Fundberichte aus Schwaben*, n.f. III (1916), 154-201.

⁴² F. Fremersdorf, *Das frankische Gräberfeld Köln-Müngersdorf* (1955), pp. 14-18.