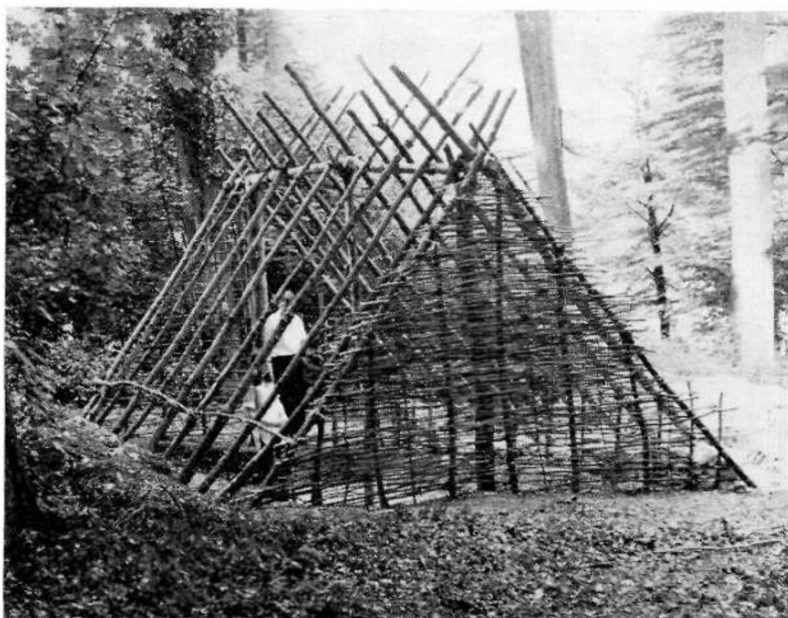


**T**HE round houses of the Celts and the villas of the Romans were followed in later periods by equally distinctive houses. Two in particular are well-known: the sunken huts or *grubenhauser* of the Saxons, and the timber-framed hall houses of Medieval England. Both these types are to be seen in Britain's latest museum, The Open Air Museum of the Weald and Downland, at West Dean in Sussex.

The sunken hut or *grubenhau*s is one of the simplest forms of house, being a basic tent-like structure where, in order to increase the headroom, the ground inside is dug out (see *Current Archaeology* 17). It is a very convenient type for archaeologists, for being sunken in the ground the remains are very obvious. The type originated in Germany where at an earlier period they were described by Tacitus (*Germania* 16): "The Germans are accustomed to dig out subterranean caves which they then cover with mud. These serve both as a refuge from the cold and as a store for food, for places of this type ward off the biting cold. And if an enemy comes, although anything obvious is destroyed, yet these *grubenhauser* are hidden, and are thus either ignored or missed because they need to be looked for."

Although their remains are found fairly frequently in this country yet it is difficult to know just what they looked like or how they worked. Did they flood? Were they really warm? How long did they last? How tall were they? Were they floored? Some, as at West Stow, were almost certainly floored, whilst others equally certainly were not. In order therefore to answer some of these questions an attempt is being made to reconstruct one of these huts at the West Dean Museum.

The reconstruction is based on a hut excavated by Mr. Eric Holden in 1964 at Old Erringham, near Shoreham-on-Sea. It measured at least 16 feet long by 10 or 11 feet wide, with post holes at either



A Saxon sunken hut in process of reconstruction. The ground inside has been dug to a depth of 2 to 3 feet, and a doorway has been constructed at the far end.

# The West Dean Museum

end for the two ridge poles, while there were also subsidiary post holes along the line of the ridge. It was evidently a weaving hut, for over 70 loom weights were found on the floor, their position indicating at least two looms. It is hoped to reconstruct one of these looms in the hut. When we visited it, the

pit had been dug out and the framework erected, and they were facing problems of roofing (thatching?) and the gable ends (wattle and daub?). However, it is hoped to have the hut finished by the time the museum is open to the public in September, and then to leave it to the ravages of winter.