

## Bronze Age Boatbuilding in Suffolk?

by Valerie Fenwick

In historic times the East Coast was a maritime highway used by every kind of ship, but we all tend to overlook the extent to which it must have functioned as a transport route in unrecorded times. There are few clues, and no Iron Age or Roman shipwrecks have yet been found in the North Sea. The Snape and Sutton Hoo ship-burials and the Graveney Boat are unique discoveries in the 2600-year vacuum which ends with Medieval shipwrecks, and the ships depicted on the seals of ports like Dunwich and Ipswich.

Of course we already had proof (for instance, from the distribution of metalwork) that there was contact between England and the Continent in prehistory. It was necessarily maritime, but the knowledge failed to change our land-bound mind-set.

However, two discoveries – one in Dover and the other on the Humber upstream of Hull – have transformed our knowledge of sea-craft in the Middle Bronze Age. The extraordinary sculpted oak



*In 1992 a Bronze-Age ship was found 22ft below road level in the heart of Dover*

planks found eroded on the Humber shore at North Ferriby, and at Dover deeply buried in silt, were stitched together and waterproofed with moss in the seams. While they differed in design, both had been built in the same way without the use of any wooden or metal nails.



*The huge planks had been carved with upstanding features and were fastened with either wedges or twisted yew withies*

Archaeologists had never imagined that laths, wedges, and stitches made of twisted yew branches, would be enough to fasten planked craft and keep caulking in place. It appeared to be an