

# NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

## REPORT TO MEMBERS

### 2010/11

<http://www.norfolkarchtrust.org.uk>



An air photograph of Caistor from the south west showing the newly-purchased 55 acres of arable land outlined in red in the foreground along the west bank of the River Tas. The rest of the Trust's holding is outlined in yellow. The town centre within the late Roman defences can be seen in the background across the river. Visitors will soon be able to enjoy the fine views over the Roman town from the high ground near the railway line to the left. *Photo by Mike Page.*

**This Annual Report is a summary of the work of the Trust on some of our properties over the last year for presentation to the AGM, which will be held at the Assembly House, Norwich on Tuesday 11th October. The big news of the year has been the purchase of additional land at the Roman town at Caistor. We have also taken on the lease of Burnham Norton Friary, and we are currently acquiring the Bronze Age burial mound at Fiddler's Hill between Binham and Warham.**

### Caistor Roman Town

Now and again the Trust takes a major leap forward with its acquisitions, and the purchase of an additional 55 acres of the town and its suburbs on the west bank of the River Tas can be a cause of some celebration. The funding was provided through an 82% grant from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, and it is believed that this is the first time that the Fund has contributed to the purchase of an archaeological site. The purchase would not have been possible, however, without additional generous funding, and indeed encouragement, from English Heritage and South

Norfolk Council. The next step is to organise shallow cultivation to create a seedbed for the new grass, a metal detector survey, fieldwalking of the surface after winter weathering to record the pottery scatters and a geophysical survey of the field. Some preliminary geophysics at the northern end has already revealed the line of the Roman road from Colchester and also a multi-period system of enclosures and buildings alongside the road. We have high hopes that when the gap in the geophysics between this new survey area and the previous survey on the opposite bank is filled



The results of the trial geophysical survey at the north end of the new field at Caistor show the Roman road frontage lined with some masonry buildings and a multi-period pattern of enclosures to the west. Two roads can also be seen heading west from the river crossing, and the Roman bridge must lie somewhere between the two survey areas. *Geophysics by Dave Bescoby.*

in, the location of the Roman bridge over the River Tas will become apparent. Two roads heading west up the hill from the river crossing are also clear from the geophysics.

The Trust is currently in discussions with the Norfolk Wildlife Trust and Natural England about how best to develop the new land as a flora-rich grassland and how to make it ideal for ground-nesting birds. One option, which we have tried successfully at Burgh Castle, is to cut pathways through the standing hay to encourage walkers to follow particular routes, thus leaving most of the grassland undisturbed until after hay cutting in late summer. It is very important that we enhance the new land both for wildlife and archaeology conservation, while at the same encouraging public access.



One of the trenches in the forum area showing the very white flint foundations of Atkinson's Forum 2 cutting through a red layer of burnt soil and roof tiles from an earlier phase timber destroyed by fire. The wall just behind the trench supervisor, Sarah Bates, belongs to Atkinson's Forum 1.

Clearly, a new bridge over the Tas will be necessary to link the two parts of the property, and its possible location will be discussed with the Environment Agency.



A flashback to Atkinson's excavations in the forum in 1933, demonstrating just how techniques have improved over the last 78 years. In those days the method was to trench along the walls to reveal the plan of a building, but it destroyed the relationships between the walls and the layers of soil close to them. Excavations were carried out using local workmen. *Photo courtesy of Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service.*

The results of the 2011 excavations will be published, as before, in a Caistor supplement with the spring newsletter. However, it is worth highlighting at this stage that Will Bowden's trenches within the forum this year have revealed a more complex sequence than Donald Atkinson understood in the 1930s. As well as the two main masonry phases, it is now clear that there was an earlier timber phase of the forum which suffered a catastrophic fire.

## The people who do the real work for the Trust

It is all too easy to pass over the vital maintenance work performed on our properties by a loyal band of site wardens who keep each one in such good order. We can feature only some of them here. When visitors go to our Bloodgate Hill Iron Age fort in South Creake, they will always find the car park quite immaculately maintained by Tim Hutchins, the gamekeeper of the surrounding estate. At Filby, Ros Bird, who runs RB's Gardening, keeps the Unitarian Chapel site in excellent condition.



Tim Hutchins, the Trust's site warden at Bloodgate Hill, South Creake.



Ros Bird at work on the Filby Unitarian Chapel site with its eighteenth-century grave slabs.

And, at Burgh Castle we have the dedicated duo of John Russell, the key keeper, and David Eggett, our site warden who does the maintenance work and keeps the car park tidy. Between them they pick up litter and have become experts at seeing off night-time drinking parties and campers who light fires and leave beer cans and broken bottles lying around. Several times this summer John and David have had to call out Great Yarmouth police to assist them in evicting trouble makers.

One piece of vandalism we were unable to prevent at Burgh Castle was the toppling of a part of the south wall of the fort. It is unlikely that these broken lumps of Roman masonry can now be restored, and English Heritage may well decide that it is best to have them removed.



John Russell (left) and David Eggett, key keeper and site warden at Burgh Castle.



The leaning section of the south wall at Burgh Castle with the lump of Roman masonry to the right which has recently been dislodged, probably through vandalism. *Photo by David Gurney.*



The dislodged section of Roman masonry at Burgh Castle.

## Burgh Castle

### Wildlife conservation

Many of the visitors to Burgh Castle come to see the wildlife, especially the Marsh Harriers which nest each year in the reed beds between the fort and the river. There is often a fine view of these magnificent birds from our viewing platform. Dr Paul Noakes, one of the local bird watchers, has recorded 150+ bird species using the site regularly and a further 100+ which use the site from time to time. There were six or seven pairs of Skylarks nesting in the hay meadows this summer. These ground-nesting birds, which are in sharp decline, are greatly assisted by our late cutting of hay, which also allows wildflowers to set their seed.

We now have 25 recorded species of butterflies, no less than 16 species of dragonflies and three types of orchid. Many of these species have only been seen since the Trust took over the property in 1995. New records for 2011 by John Burton include the Green Hairstreak Butterfly, the Variable Damselfly and the Pyramidal Orchid.

The view out to the Berney Arms windmill and the Halvergate Marshes must be one of the best in Norfolk, and this is all open for the public to enjoy at no charge!

### New information panels for the car park

The contract for the much delayed information panels to go in the timber-framed shelters and on the viewing platform is being completed by Trevor and Imogen Ashwin, and the panels will be erected shortly.



Pyramidal Orchids seen for the first time this year at Burgh Castle.  
*Photo by John Burton*

## Burnham Norton Friary

### Conservation of the precinct wall and scrub clearance

At Burnham Norton the precinct wall has been fully conserved by Norfolk County Council over the summer so that the upstanding remains, which were previously in their guardianship, could be handed over to the Trust in good order. The next step is to clear the scrub off the church earthworks, and we are being offered funding to do this from English Heritage. The whole property will then be in much better order, and we can think next about a new information panel once the earthworks are visible again.

### Fiddler's Hill

#### Conservation of the precinct wall and scrub clearance

We announced in the spring newsletter that the Trust is acquiring this Bronze Age burial mound from Norfolk County Council. The site used to be a picnic place, but in recent years it has become rather overgrown and difficult to reach. Again, with a grant from English Heritage, the vegetation will soon be cleared, a number of sycamore trees will be felled and the site made open again. Before the transfer to the Trust, Norfolk County Council had planted a number of rare varieties of apple trees near the mound. We don't believe they will cause any significant archaeological damage, and on any information board we erect on the site we will need to identify the apples! Clearly September will be a good time to visit Fiddler's Hill.



The 2011 open air service at St Benet's Abbey. Unfortunately, just after this picture was taken the bishop's sermon was brought to an abrupt halt when the heavens opened. The rather wet-looking bishop was heard saying that it would have been an appropriate moment for a baptism!

## St Benet's Abbey

### Bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund

There has not yet been a public announcement from the Heritage Lottery Fund about our bid to carry out conservation work and improve access at St Benet's, but we live in high hopes....

*Text & Photography Peter Wade-Martins Design by Sue White*