

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

REPORT TO MEMBERS

2009/10

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



Air photograph taken by Mike Page on 6th July at Caistor looking north with the Roman street plan showing up remarkably well through the grass during very dry weather. One of the two excavation trenches this year was dug across the diagonal street in the north east corner.
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 to be held at the Assembly House, Norwich on Tuesday 12th October. It is pleasing to report that we have completed the rather fine new car park and disabled access facilities at Burgh Castle, made significant progress with our St Benets Abbey Round 2 bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund and carried out further repairs to the Roman town walls at Caistor.

Caistor Roman Town

We illustrate here a new air photograph taken by Mike Page this summer showing the Roman street pattern at Caistor. This is certainly the best air view we have seen of the streets in recent years. This photograph was followed by the excavations within the town directed by Will Bowden which attracted over five thousand people in three weeks. The fact that it was known that Time Team would be filming no doubt helped to boost numbers, but it nevertheless does demonstrate how interested Norfolk people are in archaeology. These numbers do also underline the public benefit of the Trust's conservation work.

As well as the excavations in the main field, there was also a further excavation on the south side of Caistor church in advance of the construction of an extension to the church. It has long been known that the south west corner of the church is built of Roman tiles, but it was particularly interesting this year to see, quite clearly, that this corner is the oldest part of the building, and that Roman tiles here are remarkably well preserved below ground level.

More details of the excavation will, as last year, be published in a special Caistor supplement distributed with the Spring Newsletter.

Caistor Roman Town



A visit to the Caistor excavations by Daniel Fox, Leader of Norfolk County Council, David White, Chief Executive and other senior members and officers on 8th September. *Photo by David Gurney*

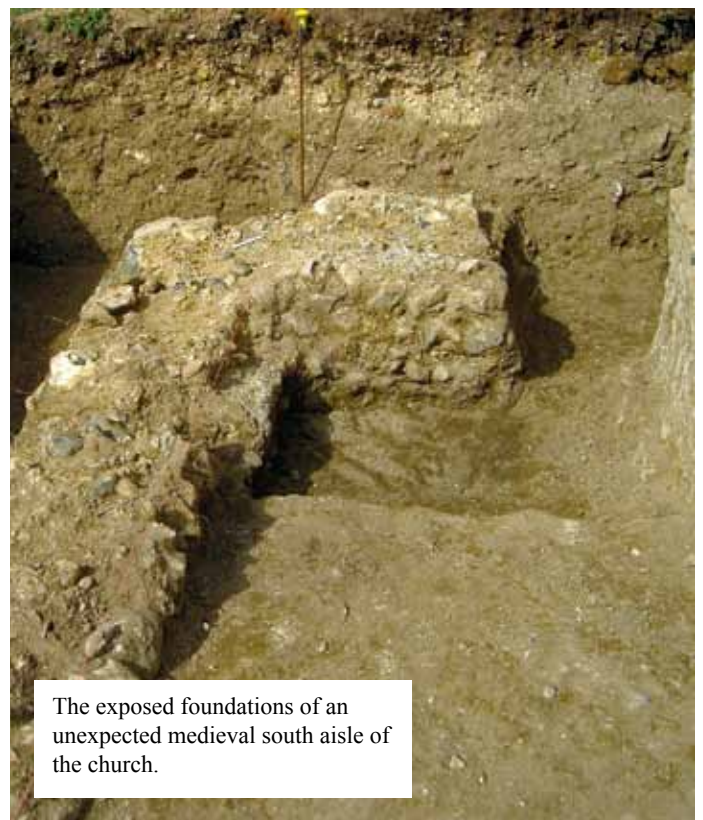


Early stages of the trench at Caistor cut through the diagonal street in the north east corner of the town showing the road surface just below plough level



Excavation on the south side of Caistor church in advance of a new extension demonstrated that the south west corner, built of Roman tiles, is the oldest part of the building. The insert shows a close-up of the Roman tiles in the south west corner freshly exposed below ground level.

Meanwhile, the Trust's conservation work on the town walls were in their final season, with further repairs all along the north wall where there was severe frost damage last winter. The effects of the frost were particularly obvious at the east end where there is deep bank of soil against the inner face of the wall so that this section is always damp and particularly vulnerable to frost. The only sure way of protecting the wall is to cover it with soil, but that would obviously disappoint visitors.



The exposed foundations of an unexpected medieval south aisle of the church.



Further conservation work by the Trust on the Roman north wall at Caistor to repair last winter's frost damage.

Burgh Castle “Access for All” Project

The completion of the new car and coach park, together with a network of re-enforced pathways and kissing gates designed for the disabled at Burgh Castle is a real milestone for the Trust on one of its key monuments. The attractive layout, with its winding route up to the church and two superb interpretation shelters, designed by Su Chisnell and funded by Natural England, has been well received and does greatly enhance a visit to the Roman fort.



One of the two new timber-framed shelters designed to hold the interpretation panels to be installed for a spring opening at Burgh Castle.



The fine new car park entrance to the Trust's property at Burgh Castle with the church in the distance.

The next stage is to install the information panels to go into the shelters and on the new viewing platform overlooking the marshes. The contract to design and supply these panels has been awarded to Anne Mason, and they should be in place by the spring, in time for a formal opening.

The discovery of a large colony of bee orchids in the hay meadow in front of the fort's east gate and the news that two pairs of marsh harriers nesting in the reed beds reared five young this year is another boost for the Trust's conservation work. A genuine sighting of an osprey being chased off by the marsh harriers created quite a stir amongst local birdwatchers!



One of the many bee orchids in the hay meadow in front of the fort's east gate.



The carefully landscaped viewing platform overlooking the reed beds, the river and the Halvergate Marshes at Burgh Castle. It has just a wire mesh front to minimise the landscape impact of the platform as viewed from the river. The platform was designed by Su Chisnell from an original concept by Sue White.

St Benets Abbey

Excellent progress is being made by a team led by Anne Mason and Hilary Brown in working up the Round 2 bid to be presented to the Heritage Lottery Fund in February. With the new two-stage process in the bidding for HLF funds it is possible to develop a site management plan and an activity plan in great detail which creates many more opportunities for public benefit on projects the HLF support.

The bid, if it is successful, will fund conservation work on the medieval gatehouse and windmill, the remains of the abbey church and the precinct wall. A small car park and disabled access routes will also be created. A key part of the development stage of the project is a series of surveys covering all aspects of the archaeology and wildlife, including birds, butterflies and dragonflies, and it is in this context that we publish a picture of a swallowtail butterfly seen this year on the wildflower area which is being created between the river and the gatehouse.

We have commissioned an access audit and reports on audience development, technological access and educational opportunities. We are also preparing detailed proposals for site interpretation through information panels, leaflets, a new website and other high-tech possibilities. Clearly, schools learning and training workshops will all be key parts of the project.



Visit by Norman Lamb, M.P. to hear about the Trust's conservation and access project at St Benets Abbey, with Anne Mason and Hilary Brown, the project officers.



Families visiting St Benets Abbey are being asked to fill in a questionnaire to find out what changes people would like to see on the site.

Promotion of the Trust's conservation work

A new display stand, designed by Trevor and Imogen Ashwin, has been commissioned this year to make the work of the Trust better known and to encourage new members. The new stand will be on display in the Assembly House for members to see at this year's AGM.



The Trust's new display stand featuring some of our properties and stressing the four themes of the Trust's work: conservation and repair, enabling research, wildlife conservation and "Archaeology is for people".



A swallowtail butterfly spotted this summer on the Trust's new wildflower area at St Benets Abbey.