

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST REPORT TO MEMBERS 2005/6



Adrian Fox, foreman of the team working at Caistor, brushing down a fresh area of mortar on the inside face of the north wall.
Photo Peter Wade-Martins

This annual report is distributed to members prior to the 2006 AGM which will be held in the Assembly House, Norwich on Tuesday 17th October. While it covers the work of the Trust for the whole year, we focus particularly on the last six months following the distribution of the Spring Newsletter.

There will be a short presentation on recent work at the AGM to which all members are cordially invited.

Caistor Roman Town Phase One of town wall conservation completed

During the summer the first phase of the consolidation and conservation the town walls was completed. Under the supervision of the Trust's building surveyor, David Watt, the whole of the north wall and a sample area at the west end of the south wall have been re-pointed and "rough raked". This is the term used for cleaning out all the loose material and adding a weather-proof top to prevent further deterioration caused by frost and trampling livestock.

The most difficult area to deal with has been the south wall where the protection of the chalk grassland plant species growing on the wall and on the bank has to be given as much priority as wall conservation. That is why only a sample trial area has been done this year. Phase Two will include the rest of the south bank in another season.



A site meeting at Caistor between David Watt (right), the Trust's building surveyor, Mark Lusher of W.S. Lusher & Son and his site foreman Adrian Fox (left) at the south wall discussing how best to carry out the necessary repairs to the Roman stonework while at the same time causing minimal damage to the rare chalk-loving plants growing on the wall.
Photo Peter Wade-Martins

Dry summer reveals Roman streets

Readers will remember that July was desperately hot, making it very difficult for the men working on the walls, but during this dry spell the outlines of the Roman streets showed up well for all to see. The best vantage point to view the streets was from a train on the London line where it goes past Caistor.



An air photo taken by Mike Page of Caistor in mid July this year when the grass was parched, showing the Roman street system and roads running south from the town centre outside the defences.
Photo Mike Page

Caistor Roman Town Research Project

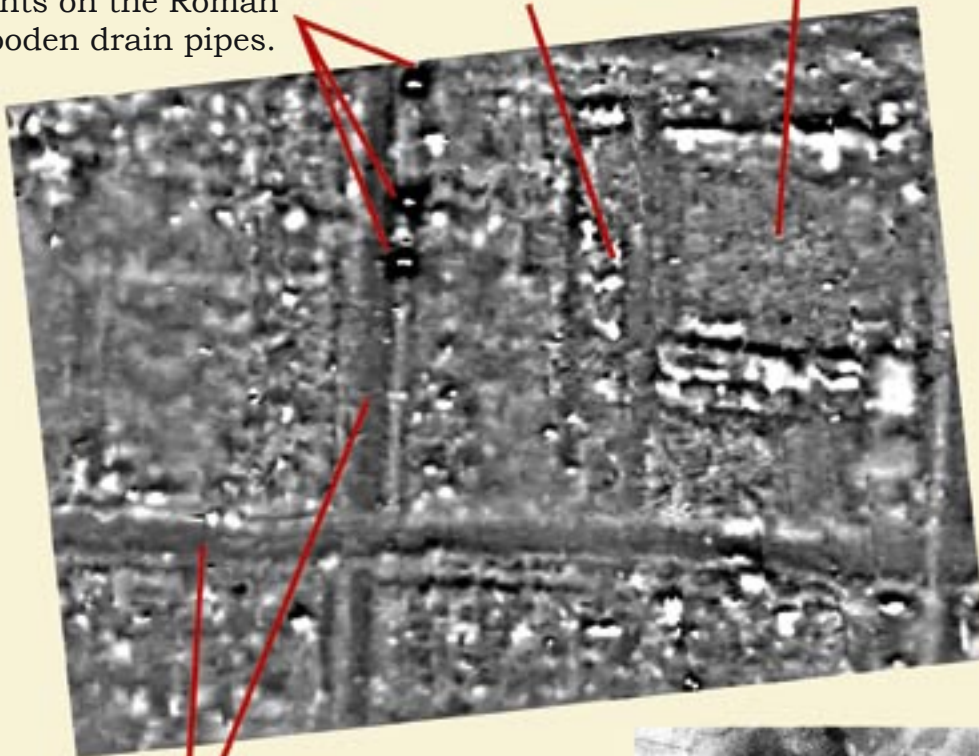
In the Spring Newsletter we announced that the Trust had given its full support to proposals from Will Bowden, Lecturer in Roman Archaeology at Nottingham University, to run a research project on the Roman Town and its environs. There were to be consultation meetings at Caistor and at South Norfolk Norfolk Council's offices at Long Stratton in June. There is no doubt that they were both a resounding success. The public meeting at Caistor was held in the parish church where there was a full house to hear Will present his proposals in some detail. Everyone present seemed delighted to hear what he had to say, and he was able leave Caistor that day knowing that local people were fully behind his exciting concept. We would all like to know more about the Roman town, and his step-by-step approach delighted everybody.

Recent advances in technology mean that everyone can be kept fully up-to-date with his discoveries as the project unfolds over the next few years. South Norfolk Council has commissioned a new panel in the car park to announce the project in outline, and visitors are encouraged to find out more through the project's website www.south-norfolk.gov.uk/venta, Background information on the town is on the Trust's own website www.norfarchtrust.org.uk.

Signals showing the iron joints on the Roman wooden drain pipes.

Basilica

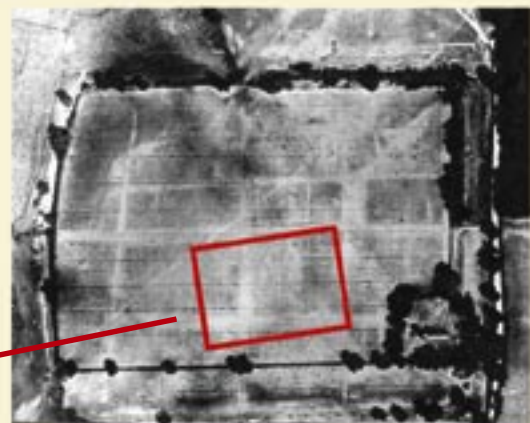
Forum



Roman Streets

Geophysical Survey of Caistor Roman Town 2006

Aerial photograph showing the Roman street plan with the geophysical survey area highlighted.





Sue White, the Trust's interpreter and panel designer, with the new panel in the Caistor car park which explains the research project to visitors.
Photo Peter Wade-Martins

Trial geophysics in July using a machine which looked a bit like a moon buggy revealed details of the buried evidence of the Roman town which more than fulfilled everyone's expectations. Satellite-based ground positioning helps considerably in locating each reading as the machine is moved across the site. The results of the July trial work are shown here, and it is hoped that new survey areas will be added to the plot in September and will be on view at the Trust's AGM



The caesium vapour magnetometer in use on site during the trial run in July. A satellite positioning system on the carriage records the location of each reading.
Photo Will Bowden

In the first season there will also be a transect of boreholes put across the Tas valley opposite the town to record the stratigraphy of the valley deposits. It is hoped that this will reveal the location of previous courses of the River Tas and possibly also identify deep sealed waterlogged layers containing important environmental evidence. Two questions we are often asked are: (a) was the river navigable in the Roman period? and (b) did the river really flow close to the western side of town when it was occupied in the Roman period as we show it in the reconstruction published in the guidebook? We may soon know the answers.

Burgh Castle Improvement plans delayed

It was very disappointing to hear in early August that the Trust's grant application to the Rural Enterprise Scheme to cover the major part of the cost of constructing the much-needed visitor facilities at Burgh Castle did not succeed. The reason given by the scheme organisers was that they did not believe that the high costs involved would show sufficient return in terms of economic regeneration of the area.

We do not know of any other fund likely to be able to finance these facilities, and we therefore have to conclude that the scheme as devised was too ambitious.

The problem, as we have said many times, is that the planning and highways authorities will not allow us to provide new car parking off Church Lane because it is too narrow for the increased levels of traffic. That is why a long new access road had to be a part of the scheme. We are now reconsidering our options with the Parish Council and the Parochial Church Council to see if better facilities can be provided in any other way. We know that the church community would like to see the church itself used more to celebrate the life of St Fursey, who may well have had his monastery within the Roman fort. So, some joint use of the church might possibly be an option. However, car and coach access and the lack of toilets will still remain a major problem.

Ferry service started

It is now possible to reach Burgh castle by river ferry from Great Yarmouth. The new service run by "Tug" Wilson on his *Southern Belle* was launched on 4th July amid much press and television interest. The possibility of the Trust having its own landing stage on the river is now being discussed with the Great Yarmouth Port Authority who control the navigation on this part of the river. A trip up through Breydon Water from Yarmouth to Burgh Castle or on to Reedham is a wonderful experience. A timetable can be obtained from Tug Wilson on 07906 020225.



The *Southern Belle* river ferry sets out on 4th July on its first scheduled trip from Great Yarmouth amid considerable publicity.
Photo Peter Wade-Martins

Middleton Mount

Management plan agreed with the parish

The Trust always gives high priority to establishing a good working relationship with the local community whenever it takes on a new property. This is certainly true at Middleton, where a draft management plan for the motte and bailey castle has been presented to the Parish Council and distributed for consultation to all the local residents. There is a need to eliminate the nettles and thistles which have taken over large areas of the site in recent years, we should replace the entrance stile with a kissing gate and build steps up the castle mound which can be slippery in wet weather. The interpretation panel, erected in 1992, is worn out and needs replacing. These proposals have won full support from local people and they have been endorsed by the Parish Council which now takes over routine management of the property.

We recognise that this is a site which will not attract a large number of visitors, and indeed it would not be appropriate as a tourist attraction because of its location within a housing estate. Good management and low-key access is the best way forward.



At Middleton the residents in the surrounding houses which overlook the site have been consulted on the draft management plan.

Photo Peter Wade-Martins

The Great Hall, Norwich

Medieval office to let!

One of the few buildings the Trust owns is the Great Hall in Oak Street, Norwich. This fine late medieval hall house with its open timber roof has for many years been let as offices, and it is currently vacant. The letting agents are Brown & Co in Norwich, and details can be obtained from them on 01603 629871.



The Great Hall in Oak Street available for office letting.

Photo Peter Wade-Martins



A model of the proposed secondary entrance and service building to be built within the old north aisle of Binham church.

Image supplied by David Frost

Binham Priory

Bid submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund

The bid for the Binham Access and Conservation Project was submitted to the HLF on 25th August. This is a joint proposal between the Trust and Binham Parochial Church Council, with the PCC being the lead partner. The Trust will conserve the monastic gatehouse and precinct wall, provide an interpretation panel for the gatehouse and arrange for the finds excavated by the old Ministry of Works in the 1930s to be examined. The PCC will restructure the access to the church and the cloisters and provide a new entrance into the church on the site of the north aisle which was pulled down in the nineteenth century. In the church there will be fresh displays which will set out the history of the priory and there will be display cases containing some of the finds from the 1930s excavations. English Heritage, for its part, will provide new interpretation panels for the cloisters and east end of the priory church.

This whole proposal involved an enormous amount of discussion and consultation with all the relevant statutory and advisory bodies before we could reach the stage we are in now where everybody has given the project unqualified support.

St Benets Abbey

Riverbank works completed

All the engineering works at the abbey to protect the riverbank from erosion and to raise it in places to meet flood protection requirements have been finished. The silt pumped by the Broads Authority into the pond near the gatehouse has been levelled and reseeded, and it all looks good.

It is now time to revive the management plan for the site approved two years ago and consider seriously how we can best improve visitor access, site interpretation and some stabilisation of the stonework where it is needed.



St Benet's Abbey.

Photo Sue White

Text by Peter Wade-Martins Design by Sue White