

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST REPORT TO MEMBERS 2007/8

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One of the wildflower reserves left undisturbed on the wall to ensure the survival of wall bedstraw in this extremely rare habitat.

This Annual Report is distributed to members prior to the 2008 AGM which will be held at the Assembly House, Norwich on Tuesday 7th 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..

Binham Priory

Repairs to the long precinct wall soon to be finished

Following a successful fund-raising campaign, effort is now focused on finishing the building work before the winter. We illustrated the newly-conserved gatehouse in the Spring Newsletter, and there is no doubt that this does make a fine entrance into the priory. Since then our building contractors, W.S.Lusher & Son, have been repointing and repairing the long length of precinct wall which runs south from the gatehouse alongside the Warham Road. By the time we hold the AGM, we should be within two or three weeks of finishing the whole wall.

The wall has proved to be a mix of medieval work with many later repairs. The most difficult sections to conserve were those where ivy had become deeply established within the structure. Ivy roots had worked their way into the interior pushing out the wall face, which in places had to be taken down and rebuilt.



During the repairs a Romanesque capital was found re-used in the inner side of the precinct wall.

Every effort has been made to preserve the rare wall bedstraw plant growing on the front face, and Gillian Beckett, our botanical adviser, has identified sections which should not be disturbed. These have been left untouched as wildflower reserves in the hope that, given time, the plant will colonise out from these reserves onto the repaired sections.

Excavations near the Binham priory church

Archaeological Project Services is the archaeological contractor engaged by our project partners, the Binham P.C.C., to work alongside their building contractor, Fisher & Sons (Fakenham) Ltd., in areas where ground levels have had to be reduced for improved access to the new service building in the north aisle. At the time of writing pre-priory features have certainly been found, but so far there is no dating evidence from them.

Meanwhile, an excellent report on the pottery from the 1930s' excavations has been completed by Sue Anderson, and Jackie Hall will soon have concluded her research on the architectural stone. We hope to display some of this material in new cabinets to be installed in the church, and we await the outcome of negotiations with the Norfolk Museums Service and English Heritage on what can be displayed and what conservation may be required in advance of the material being returned to Binham.

St Benet's Abbey High guidebook sales

Following the launch in the Spring of our new guidebook to St Benets, it is good to report high sales for this, our third, publication. The book is available in most of the local shops and churches, in the Broads Authority tourist information points and in the cathedral. It is clearly satisfying a demand for more information about this much-loved monument, and it has been at the top of the Jarrolds list of best selling books of local interest for many weeks.

Volunteer wardens take over site management

The gatehouse and windmill is often recognised as the iconic symbol of the Broads. It is therefore very fitting that the Broads Authority has kindly taken on the role of recruiting and training local volunteers to be site wardens for St Benets. This involves grounds maintenance, litter picking and regular risk assessments. This co-operation between the Trust, the Broads Authority and the voluntary sector is proving a model example of everyone working to improve the site and to make it more accessible for visitors.



The team of Broads Authority volunteer wardens at a training session at St Benets Abbey.

Riverbank deteriorating

The initial repairs to the riverbank did prevent further erosion of the archaeology, but high water levels and cattle trampling have severely damaged the top of the rebuilt bank, exposing the stone-filled wire gabions to the point where they have become dangerous. There is a now real risk that visitors might trip and fall into the river.



Excavations in advance of the new Binham church path revealed ditches and other features pre-dating the burial ground.

BESL the Consortium which designed and built the gabions, has been made aware of the problem, and their designers are currently working on a modification to the scheme to raise the riverbank still further to keep it well above high water levels.



Erosion of the riverbank caused by high water levels and cattle trampling have exposed the stone-filled wire gabions. Further work is now urgently needed to make the gabion tops safe to walk on.

Caistor Roman Town

Phase 2 of Roman town wall repairs

Thanks to a grant from English Heritage earlier in the year, the Trust has been able to commission the preparation of a specification for the final stage of repairs to the Roman town walls. These repairs will take in most of the south wall, the upstanding bastion at the west end and the lumps of masonry near the car park. Tenders are now in from three building contractors. With fees for the building surveyor, a

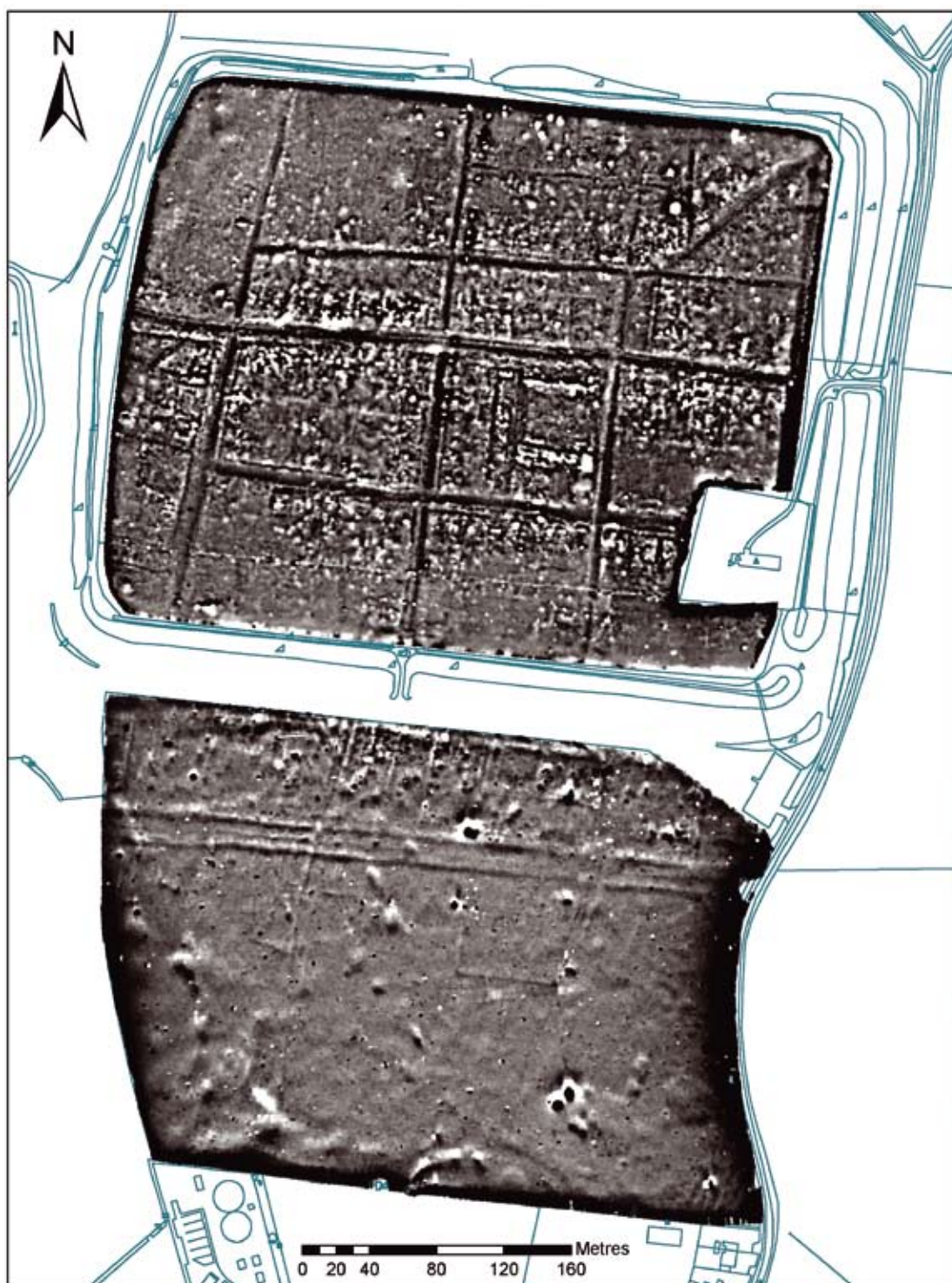
Photographer to record the walls before and afterwards and the Norfolk Wildlife Trust to monitor the work to limit damage the rare chalk grassland plants on the south bank, the total cost comes to about £140,000. Grant applications are now in hand for this important work.

Geophysical survey

The next stage of the Caistor Project's geophysical survey by David Bescoby has been the amphitheatre field to the south of the Roman town defences. Although the results are less dramatic than those from the Roman town interior, they are nevertheless equally remarkable. The amphitheatre itself, which shows up so well on air photographs in the south west corner of the field, is hardly visible on the magnetometer plot, but the three parallel early military ditches and substantial traces of buildings along the east-to-west street to the north are particularly clear. Possible prehistoric circular features are also evident.



Dr David Bescoby with his caesium vapour magnetometer in the amphitheatre field at Caistor.



The results of both the magnetometer survey of the area enclosed by the Roman town defences and the 2008 survey of the amphitheatre field to the south put together. The next two areas to be covered are between these two surveys and the field and gardens to the north of the town. (Survey results provided by David Bescoby).

Fieldwalking survey

Alongside the research on the Roman town itself, Will Bowden has been recruiting volunteers to assist with a fieldwalking survey of the surrounding parishes. The hundredth volunteer has just been signed up, and they will be working in six teams over the winter collecting and recording their finds from ploughed fields which are then washed and marked and passed on to the identification and recording team in Norfolk Landscape Archaeology at Gressenhall. Last winter the fieldwalking teams worked mainly near the A140; although little Roman material was found, one promising field did produce Middle Saxon material.

Family Fun Day

The children's Annual Fun Day at Caistor organised by South Norfolk Council on 7th August was once again appreciated by all. It attracted over 200 children this year and there was a wide range of activities from making mosaics to painting cardboard swords. A gladiator re-enactment was also much appreciated!



Children painting cardboard swords bright red during the annual Family Fun Day at Caistor St Edmund.

A marsh harrier hunting over the Trust's reed beds at Burgh Castle.

Photograph by John Russell



Text and photographs by Peter Wade-Martins Design by Sue White

Field Dalling Cottage Cottage to be sold by auction



The Trust's cottage at Field Dalling.

The Trust has owned a very attractive brick and flint cottage at 32 Langham Road Field Dalling since we bought it in 1939 to save it from demolition. The cottage was built in about 1620 and re-roofed in the first half of the eighteenth century. Our last tenant had lived there for most of her life before she moved out in February 2007, and the house was then in need of major refurbishment. Rather than spending at least £50,000 to bring it up to modern standards, it has been decided to put the cottage up for sale, and it will be auctioned by Brown & Co on 25th September at the Maid's Head in Norwich.

Burgh Castle Car park design

Careful consultations with all organisations with an interest in our Burgh castle property are now complete, and the planning application for a new car park off Butt Lane and disabled access paths to the Roman fort and to the church has been submitted. The views from the fort over the reed beds out to the Halvergate Marshes are very special, and we would like people with disabilities to enjoy them.

Displays in the church?

At the same time we are waiting to hear from the church authorities on what scope there might be for converting the north aisle into an interpretation area, covering the whole story of the Roman fort and St Fursey's monastery.