

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST SPRING NEWSLETTER 2008

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



Members of the Norfolk Archaeological Trust and Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society during the 2008 field visit to Binham hearing an erudite account from Michael Begley on the role of the gatekeeper in Benedictine monasteries.

Photo Peter Wade-Martins

In this spring newsletter we feature in particular the completion of the conservation work on the medieval gatehouse at Binham Priory and the publication of our new guidebook to St Benets Abbey.

Binham Priory Project

Last year the Heritage Lottery Fund announced their grant of £648,500 for the Binham Priory Access and Conservation Project, a partnership between the Norfolk Archaeological Trust, the Binham Priory Trust and Binham Parochial Church Council. The aim of this project, as set out in our 2007 Spring Newsletter, is to conserve the medieval gatehouse and precinct wall, to study the unpublished finds from the 1930s' excavations, to re-interpret the whole site for visitors, and to build a new entrance and toilet facilities in the demolished north aisle of the church.

Conservation progress

In addition to the lottery funding, English Heritage has generously provided a further £55,000, mostly for our work on the conservation of the gatehouse and precinct wall. But this still left the church community with a further £80,000 to find as their contribution to the funding package. The good news is that all but £10,000 of this has already been raised. It has all been a superb community effort.



A fine medieval window opened during conservation work in the east wall of the gatehouse.

Photo Peter Wade-Martins



The conserved gatehouse at Binham in May 2008 and how it looked a year ago before work started (above).

Photo Peter Wade-Martins

W.S. Lusher & Son, conservation contractors working for the Norfolk Archaeological Trust, have finished the gatehouse repairs and rebuilt the new wall flint wall around the old bullpen area to the east. The small enclosure this wall creates provides a fine setting for the gatehouse, and the whole structure is now a pleasure to see.

During this summer conservation work will focus on the long length of precinct wall which runs south from the gatehouse beside the Warham Road. This work all has to be completed by the end of October.



How best to conserve the surviving precinct wall at the priory has been subject to considerable discussion. Much of the wall probably dates from after the Dissolution, and it has been patched and repaired many times in different ways.

Photo Peter Wade-Martins

Study of the finds

The study of the finds from the pre-war Office of Works excavations has also made good progress. A very commendable report by Sue Anderson on the pottery, tiles and crucibles has been received, and items suitable for the new displays in the church are being selected. All this material was given to the Norfolk Museums Service by the Trust in the 1980s, but some of it will now be loaned back to Binham PCC. Of particular interest is a sherd of Tudor Green glazed mug stained with red vermilion probably used as an inkwell in the priory's scriptorium. A number of crucibles demonstrate that non-ferrous metalworking was practised, while a pottery water sprinkler suggests that some of the monks were keen gardeners.

We had thought that all the small finds from the old excavations had been lost, but Sue White, while working on the new site interpretation scheme for the priory, has found many of them, through on-line records, in the stores of the Norfolk Museums Service. These include fragments of stained glass and painted wall plaster. There is a fragment of a beautifully engraved and bejewelled gilded book plate, with the engravings on the surface showing beasts facing each other surrounded by foliage. There is also a lead seal with the Annunciation and a small cast lead figure, possibly of the Virgin Mary. It is hoped that a selection of these artefacts can be put into the new displays, although some items will need to be conserved first.



Part of a gilded bronze bookplate with jewel mounts and an engraved scene showing facing beasts found in material from the 1930s' excavations. Conservation will be necessary before this can be displayed. *Photo Sue White*

Old photographs

Sue White has also found a few old press photographs taken in 1936 of the excavations and the consolidation of the east range. It is a pity that so few photographs of all this work were apparently taken at the time. Does any member of the Trust or the Archaeological Society know of the existence of any more photographs of these important excavations?



A photograph taken in 1936 of the excavated chapter house and other buildings on the east side of the cloisters. Papers in the Public Record Office show that as much was spent on repair of the ruins as on the excavations. *Photo GRSRM.1993.217.571.*

Project completion

The project is due to be completed by March 2009, and the Bishop of Norwich has kindly agreed to take part in a thanksgiving service and reception at Binham on 17th May 2009.

St Benets Abbey

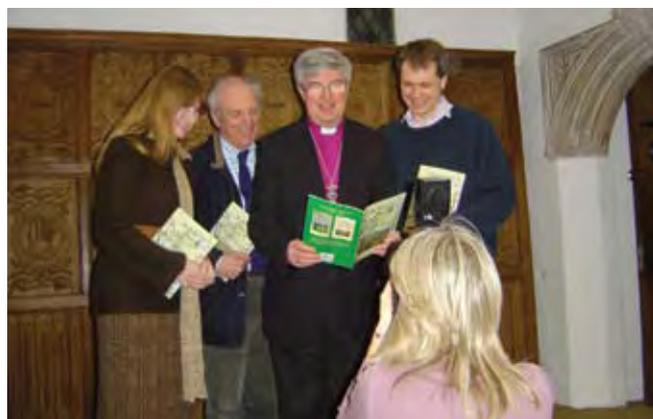
The St Benets project develops

David Watt, our building surveyor, has obtained prices from contractors for repairs to the gatehouse, church and precinct wall.

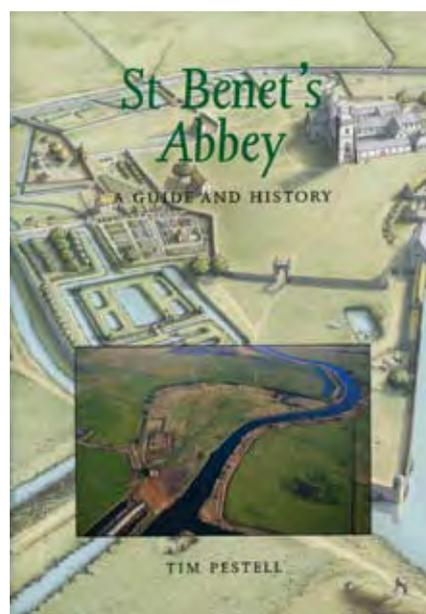
Su Chisnell, our landscape architect, has obtained planning consent for her design for the new car park and footpaths from the car park and from the adjacent Broads Authority river moorings to the gatehouse. The Broads Authority has offered a team to carry out the construction work. Once all costs are assembled, we will be applying for grants to carry out repairs and to improve public access to this iconic site.

New guidebook published

On 19th March the Bishop of Norwich, the Rt. Rev. Graham James launched the Trust's new fine colour guidebook to St Benets Abbey written by Tim Pestell and illustrated by Sue White. The EDP carried a big splash about the abbey to coincide with the launch in their weekend supplement over Easter, but they did not use the picture of the bishop we set up for them, so we reproduce here the view we took of the EDP photographer taking the photograph! We think our picture is better anyway.



The Rt. Rev. Graham James, the Bishop of Norwich, at the press launch of the St Benets Abbey guidebook in the Cathedral vestry, which is lined with panelling taken from the abbey. To the bishop's left is Tim Pestell, the author, and to his right are Stephen Heywood, architectural adviser to the project, and Sue White, who prepared the illustrations. *Photo Peter Wade-Martins*



The Trust's new guidebook to St Benets Abbey, price £3.50, is now on sale in most good bookshops, in tourist information centres around the Broads and in shops and churches in the Horning and Ludham area. *Photo Sue White*

A portrait of Mike Fuggle



Mike Fuggle with his computer.

Photo Peter Wade-Martins

The St Benets Abbey guidebook is the third published by the Trust, following similar ones for the Roman town at Caistor and the Roman fort at Burgh Castle. All three have been designed beautifully by Mike Fuggle.

Mike worked for 45 years for Jarrold Printing in Norwich, starting life at what was then known as the Empire Press as an apprentice compositor at a time when some of the older compositors still came to work in bowler hats and starched collars. Eventually he rose to be head of Jarrolds design department before he retired 16 years ago. He saw during his career the art of book design change from pencil, paper and drawing board to computers. Design for print, he says was more a craft in those early days, but now with computers it is more a technical operation, although it is of course very much faster and the quality of today's printing can be superb.

Mike personally made the transition to computer after retirement with our first guidebook on Caistor published in 2001, making the layouts for each page, but by the time he worked on the St Benets guidebook in his mid 70s, he produced almost everything on computer. This transition has given him great satisfaction, and he is keen to know what we are going to publish next!

Mike's other achievements since retiring have included *900 Years of Norwich Cathedral and Diocese* (1996), *Norfolk Churches Great and Small* by Charles Roberts and Richard Tilbrook (1997) a sumptuous volume which sadly went out of print, and *Treasures for the Future: The Norfolk Churches Trust 1978-2001* by Charles Roberts (2001).

While he waits for our next publication, Mike follows his other main passion of playing church organs (he passed his piano grades to Grade 8 after retiring) and photographing Norfolk churches. At 76 he is showing little sign of slowing down. Thank you Mike for doing a superb job on all three publications.

Text by Peter Wade-Martins Design by Sue White

Caistor

Mobitours

The new mobile phone audio tour of the Roman town, funded by South Norfolk Council, is now in operation. Visitors are encouraged to use their mobile phones to dial 0207 112 1928 and "let your adventure begin". Comments on this bright idea have varied considerably, so any members who have tried out the tour and would like to send in their comments to Peter Wade-Martins, the Director of the Trust on peterwm@hotmail.com are most welcome to do so. We can then assess visitor reactions.

Burgh Castle

John Green

It is with great sadness that we heard of the death on 26th February of John Green of Belton, from whom the Trust bought the Roman fort in 1995. John was a remarkably colourful character with an extra-ordinary sense of humour but at the same time a good businessman. While he wanted the Trust to have the fort and surrounding land, he wasn't going to sell it cheap, and it took endless discussions with no less than twenty meetings over two years before a deal acceptable to John and to the funding bodies was finally agreed. We will always be grateful to John for giving us the chance to buy the property.



John Green, on the right, with Peter Wade-Martins in June 1995 after the purchase of Burgh Castle was finally agreed.

Car park design

It is wonderful to report that fresh proposals for a new car park and access paths around the monument are making progress, thanks to a generous grant offer from Natural England towards 80% of the fees of our landscape architect, Su Chisnell. Initial consultations over the new proposals with the planning authorities, the parish council and English Heritage have all been most encouraging. While our efforts in recent years to improve visitor facilities at Burgh Castle have been delayed several times, the Natural England grant has given the whole project a much needed boost.