Norfolk Archaeological Trust
Annual report
2015

www.norfarchtrust.org.uk

Image 1: 3-D reconstruction of the view from the south gate at Caistor Roman Town produced by Jam Creative Studios during development of the new scheme.

In this Annual Report we highlight the new interpretation scheme at Caistor; research at St Benet's Abbey on the causeway and on mortar mixes; the start of a new project at Burnham Norton Friary; and progress on development of the Strategic Plan 2016 – 2021.

Caistor Roman Town
New Interpretation Scheme

This year has seen a lot of activity focused on Caistor Roman Town. At the time of writing the exciting new interpretation scheme is about to be installed at the site. This tells the story of *Venta Icenorum* from its beginnings in the 1st century AD through to its abandonment in the 8th century, and has been funded through our Higher Level Stewardship agreement with Natural England.

As reported in the Spring Newsletter, the Trust commissioned Paston-based Heritage Destination Consulting (HDC) and Jam Creative Studios (JCS) to produce the innovative new scheme which will use Augmented Reality to help visitors visualise how the Roman Town might have looked in its heyday.

Working closely with Dr Will Bowden of the University of Nottingham, JCS have produced digital reconstructions of the town based on latest research. The reconstructions are used throughout the interpretation scheme and have also been used within an Augmented Reality (AR) app. Once downloaded the app uses the camera on mobile phones or tablets to superimpose the image of the town onto the landscape. This technique should make it much easier for visitors to imagine the scale and layout of the now vanished town. Visitors without digital technology will be able to view the reconstruction drawings on panels in the traditional way.

Image 2: The new app will enable visitors to see views of the town through mobile phones and tablets. The scheme includes 3-D images of artefacts found at the site.

The Trust's brief required the new interpretation to appeal to a wide audience, including younger visitors. In response JCS have developed a couple of mole characters to introduce children to the site. They explain how the AR app works and they also provide activities for children to do as they explore the town.

We are excited about the scheme which provides new insights into the history of *Venta Icenorum* for regular visitors, and a fresh incentive for new audiences to visit.

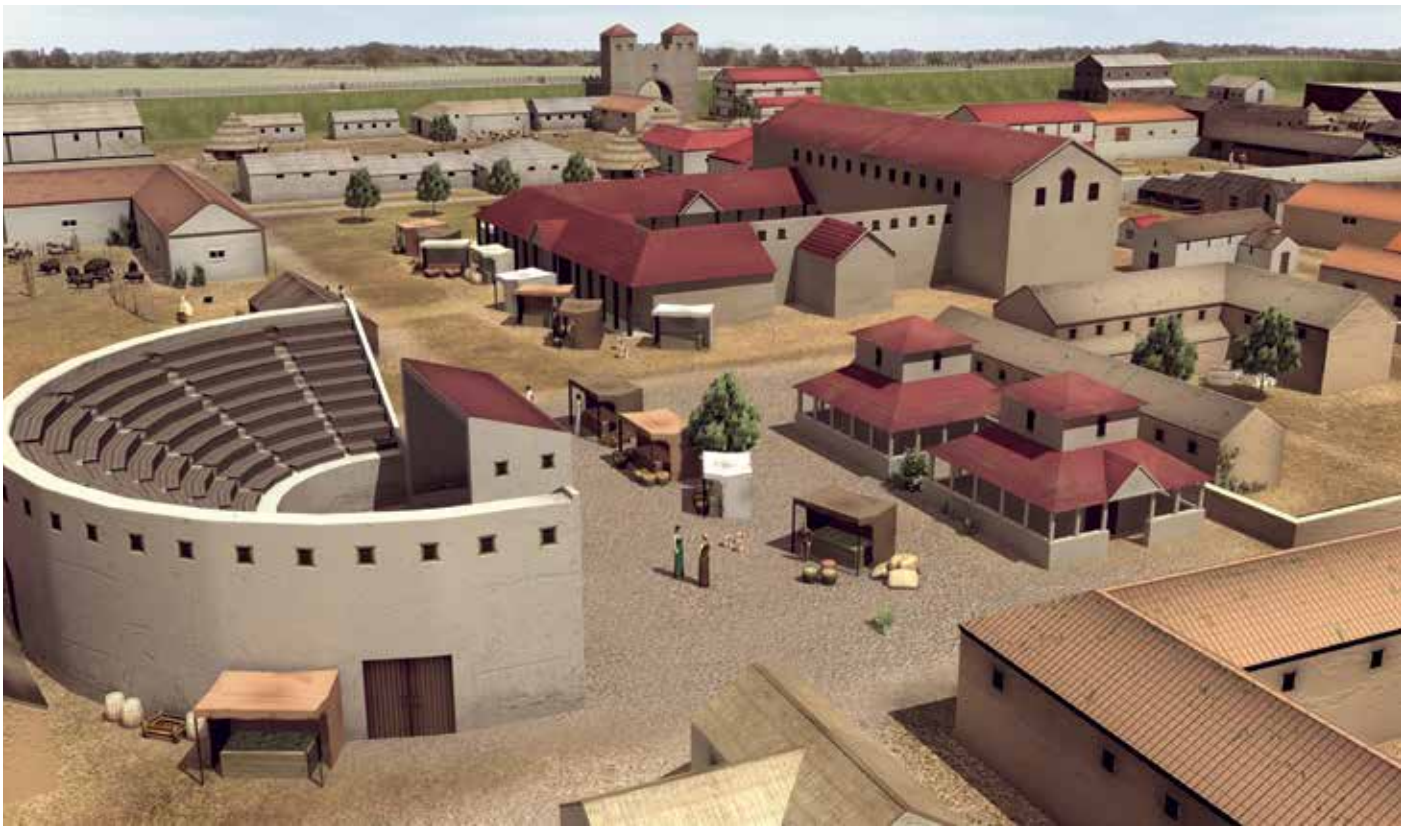


Image 3: 3-D reconstruction of the Forum and temples at Caistor Roman Town.

Image 4: Volunteer working group developing learning materials for Caistor.

Learning materials working group

Continuing the theme of developing the audience for *Venta Icenorum*, work has commenced on strengthening links with Norwich Castle Museum and with local schools, funded by an Historic England Capacity Building grant, and supported by their Local Heritage Education Manager (East).

The aim is to integrate the new interpretation scheme with a refreshed exhibition at the Museum and new learning materials for schools. A working group, including volunteers from Caistor Roman Project and local students, has already tried out materials in one school, and we are planning activities for school visits to the Town in the spring. Several primary schools have expressed an interest in visiting as well as a secondary school (where students are studying Classics at 'A' level), and students from the UEA.

The new exhibition at the Castle Museum will be developed during the winter.

Links with Caistor Roman Project

As touched on above, the Trust is liaising with the Caistor Roman Project (CRP) on a number of local projects. The CRP was originally established to work in partnership with the University of Nottingham's archaeological research project at the site and is registered as a charity with the aim of facilitating community involvement in archaeological research in and around the Roman town.
See www.caistorromanproject.org for more information.

As well as working together to develop learning materials for the site, we have also liaised on a digital interpretation project, visitor surveys, and the successful Caistor Roman Town Family Fun day in May, which was attended by some 500 visitors.

Image 5: Caistor Roman Town Family Fun Day in May was funded by South Norfolk Council and Caistor Parish Council.

Image 6: Works to walls during 2015.

Other site news at Caistor

This summer has seen the final phase of conservation repairs to the walls of the town funded by Natural England. R&J Hogg completed consolidation of the last section of the north wall and will install a small area of soft capping in the autumn, employing the same technique as that used successfully at Castle Acre Priory last year. Research carried out by English Heritage has found that soft capping with turf can provide effective protection from thermal fluctuations and freeze-thaw action.

Last season the flowering hay meadow was dominated by wild carrot and yarrow, but these plants are much less apparent this year. In addition, the grass has not grown as strongly, probably due to both the weather conditions this spring and also the proliferation of yellow rattle which is parasitic on grass roots. This has created good conditions for other wild flowers to thrive. David North (Head of People and Wildlife) and Helen Baczkowska (Conservation Officer) from the Norfolk Wildlife Trust visited in July and were impressed by the scale of the project and the variety of meadow flowers that have established.

Image 7: Dunston field flowering in June 2015.

St Benet's Abbey
New research on the causeway

Earlier this year Giles Emery of Norvic Archaeology (NA) produced a report on the archaeological mitigation work he undertook in 2014 at the medieval causeway which formerly linked St James Hospital Chapel to St Benet's Abbey[1]. His report offers some interesting insights into the construction and use of the causeway.

The uppermost deposits of the causeway were exposed within the confines of the cable trench. Giles writes that 'at the surface at least, it was constructed and maintained not unlike a medieval roadway, with a large quantity of locally available sand and gravel used as consolidation material. The busiest phase of use, represented by worn out metalling and reconsolidation and repair, may be attributed to a medieval to early post-medieval phase, when the route still served as an important land route to the Abbey site, until its abandonment in 1545 with subsequent episodes of demolition and the quarrying away of its materials.'

He goes on to say that the recorded deposits suggest that during the post-medieval period, no further concerted efforts were made to import aggregate materials to maintain the integrity of this section of the causeway; and that by the late 18th to 19th centuries the western half of the causeway was certainly a cul-de-sac and may have served as a little used access route to the adjacent drained farmland and the late 19th century steam powered pump, which was sited at approximately the same location as the current electric pump house.

Image 8: Causeway deposits looking SW
Photo: Norvic Archaeology

1 'A programme of Archaeological Mitigation Work for Ménage & Power Cable Trench at St James Hospital Chapel, Horning Hall, Horning, Norfolk' Norvic Archaeology January 2015 NHES Event Nos: ENF134808 & ENF134825

Image 9: Causeway deposits looking SE – wheel ruts visible *Photo: Norvic Archaeology.*

Mortar trials

As part of the Conservation, Access and Community project 2012 – 2014 consolidation works were completed to the precinct wall along the eastern boundary of the Abbey site by R & J Hogg. Unfortunately there have been some problems with these repairs due to a number of factors including the micro-climate created by the adjacent water-filled ditch, and overhanging bushes. In discussions with Historic England we have taken the opportunity during rectification to carry out a trial of different mortar mixes at the site: an NHL (Natural Hydraulic Lime) lime mortar for the capping masonry; a trial of 1:2 lime putty / aggregate with metastar 501 pozzalan; and a 1:3 hotlime mix.

Traditional lime putty is produced from the burning and slaking of calcareous/dolomitic stone. Mixed with sand the resultant mortar hardens or 'goes off' as a result of re-absorption of CO2 from the air (carbonation). This is a slow process. 'Pozzalan' additives, such as ash and brick dust, enable lime mortars to set more rapidly. Hydraulic limes set in contact with water rather than air (although secondary hardening also takes place in contact with air). Mortars using NHL set more quickly and tend to be less vulnerable to mechanical frost damage. 'Hot-lime' mortars are prepared by adding specific measures of quicklime to aggregate and water, mixed together to form a mortar, usually on site. Hot-mixed lime mortars seem to have good frost resistance although the reasons for this are not fully understood.
The repaired wall has been protected with rigid corrugated iron supported clear from the wall top, to be left in place over winter. The results of the trials will be available in spring 2016.

Image 10: St Benet's precinct wall during repairs showing overhanging shrubs.

The Friends of St Benet's Abbey (TFoSBA)

TFoSBA have continued to organise successful events for their 100 members and other visitors to the Abbey. In May they organised a fully-booked walk from Horning church to St James' Chapel where Alison Yardy of the Norfolk Historic Environment Service (NCC) discussed the history and construction phases of the building (see also NHER 8444). The group also staffed a stall at the Horning Boat show and organised a very successful boat trip for a hundred participants who travelled from Horning to attend the Bishop of Norwich's annual service on August 2nd. The Bishop arrived at the newly refurbished staithe – which has also been used successfully this year for an organised visit from the Fairhaven Trust, met by TFoSBA guides. This is something we hope to develop more next season. The guides have run tours of the site every Saturday, Sunday and Wednesday throughout the summer, and a special weekend of guided walks and site tours took place during the Heritage Open Days September 12-13th.

Image 11a/11b: On the way to the annual service at St Benet's Abbey in the Southern Comfort organised by TFoSBA *Photos: Roger Everett*

Image 12: The western boundary wall at Burnham Norton Friary

Burnham Norton Friary
Ecological survey

Natural England is funding repairs to the precinct wall at St Mary's Friary, Burnham Norton under our Higher-level Stewardship scheme for the site. Preparation for this got underway in May when an ecological survey was commissioned from Kepwick Ecological Services. The survey includes a number of recommendations for protecting flora and fauna during and after the proposed repairs to the wall and, in particular, identified notable colonies of flattened meadow-grass *Poa compressa* and the bryophyte (mosses, liverworts, and hornworts) *Porella platyphylla* (Wall Scalewort) which will require protective measures.

During the survey the bryologist and geologist Robin Stevenson was immediately struck by the variety of exotic lithologies present in the precinct wall adjacent to Friar's Lane, including igneous granites and basalts, metamorphic schist, and several exotic sandstones.

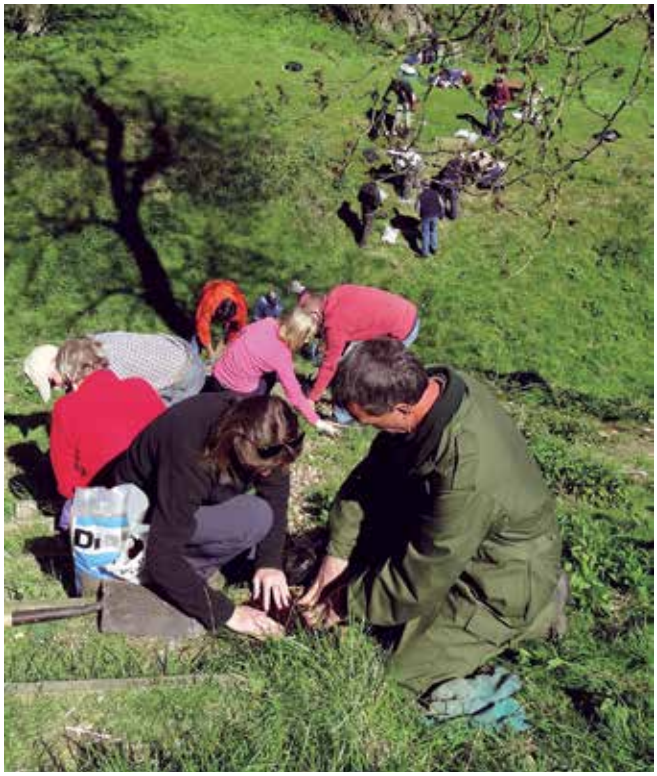
In an interesting note on the wall he writes that the size and rounded shapes of these examples are such as to preclude an origin from local glacial deposits and that a much more likely origin was as ballast material, brought in by ships visiting nearby harbours.

He goes on to say 'The most convincing evidence for a ballast origin lies with the figured clast, which shows clear signs of marine bivalve borings. This must have been obtained from a coastal marine location, and nothing similar occurs on the Norfolk coast, suggesting strongly an exotic origin. Boulders such as this would have been much favoured as ballast material being obtainable near at hand, at source, and having a commercial value at the point of arrival, when they would be replaced by a load destined for export.'

Image 13: Clast with with bivalve borings

Middleton Mount

In April the Norfolk Wildlife Trust supervised a practical session to carry out repairs to the steps at Middleton Mount which was a great success. NWT brought about twenty volunteers on the day from the newly formed Gaywood Valley Conservation (GVC) group, and three further local residents joined in. The steps are now much safer, and two of the local residents said they would keep a regular eye on the site, and report any issues arising. GVC also expressed an interest in returning to the site in the future to carry out further works which may include restoration of the pond on the southern boundary.



Images 14 and 15: Volunteers repairing the steps at Middleton Mount

Strategic Review

As reported in the Spring Newsletter the process for producing a Strategic Plan for 2016 – 2021 is underway with a small steering group set up to take the timetable forward.

Consultations with stakeholders have been taking place in the following ways:

- one-to-one interviews with Council members, based around the identified SWOT analysis.
- One-to-one interviews with representatives from organisations such as Historic England, Norfolk County Council Historic Environment Service, Heritage Lottery Fund and the Norfolk Wildlife Trust,
- An online member survey
- An online non-member survey publicised through Twitter
- Visitor surveys carried out by volunteers on site at Burgh Castle and Caistor, and St Benet's Abbey

An interim report was submitted to Council in July and a draft Strategic Plan will be submitted to Council in October for approval.

Keeping in touch

We will always be pleased to hear from members about any aspect of the Trust's work, especially if you are interested in volunteering at one of our sites!
Email: carolinedavison@norfarchtrust.org.uk
Tel: 01603462987

You can also follow us on Twitter @NorfArchTrust and we regularly update the news page of the website www.norfarchtrust.org.uk.

Text and photographs by Caroline Davison unless otherwise stated Design by Sue Walker White