

# NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST REPORT TO MEMBERS 2006/7

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



Topping out the rough racking on the gatehouse at Binham with the priory church behind.

*Photo Peter Wade-Martins*

This annual report is distributed to members prior to the 2007 AGM which will be held in the Assembly House, Norwich on Tuesday 16th 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 priory gatehouse under way

We reported in the Spring Newsletter that the partnership of the Norfolk Archaeological Trust and Binham Parochial Church Council had been awarded a remarkable grant of up to £648,500 by the Heritage Lottery Fund. This represents 73% of the total eligible costs for conservation and improved access to the priory, and it is a very substantial contribution to the project. On top of this, the Trust has been offered £50,000 by English Heritage towards the cost of the conservation of the gatehouse and precinct wall.

Work began in late June with the removal of the nineteenth-century shed built into the gatehouse for the farm bull and the demolition of the re-enforced concrete bull pen attached to it. Once they were all cleared away the full extent of the medieval structure could be seen. Since then conservation effort has focused on re-pointing the stonework and “rough racking” the wall tops to make them weather-proof. In the course of the work a medieval window has been re-opened and another has been found.

Conservation on both parts of the gatehouse is due to be completed by the autumn, leaving the long section of precinct wall beside the road to be conserved next year. Work has to stop over the winter to avoid frost damage to the new mortar.



Sand-blasting the interior of the gatehouse to clean off modern whitewash.

*Photo Peter Wade-Martins*



## Binham new church entrance

At the same time, the Parochial Church Council has commissioned the Whitworth Co-partnership, architects in Bury St Edmunds, to design access paths to the church and monument and complete detailing for the secondary entrance to the church. David Watt, who acts as building surveyor to the Trust, will oversee the conservation of the medieval fabric in the north aisle which will be incorporated into the new building. The PCC will also shortly be commissioning an overall interpretation plan for the priory.

The aim is for the whole project to be completed by the end of 2008.

## Burgh Castle Progress still slow

One has to admit that progress at Burgh Castle has been slow. While the Roman fort and the views from it out over the Halvergate marshes continue to be enjoyed by thousands of people, we have not found it easy to raise the funds to design the smaller car park and access walks around the site. It becomes clear with time that funding car parks is never easy; nobody likes car parks, yet we have to have them if the sites we conserve and make available the public are to be accessible.



Visitors enjoying the view over Halvergate marshes.

*Photo Peter Wade-Martins*

## Dogs!

There is a particular problem at Burgh Castle with many dog walkers refusing to keep their dogs on leads. It is important that they are restrained, particularly in the spring to protect ground-nesting birds in the hay meadows. Most of the gates have signs on them asking that dogs are kept on leads, but these signs frequently disappear. We have recently changed from plastic to metal signs in the hope that these will not be so easy to remove!



Signs on gates at Burgh Castle asking dog owners to keep their dogs on leads frequently disappear.

*Photo Peter Wade-Martins*



Members try out the new steps during the spring visit to Middleton.

*Photo Peter Wade-Martins*

## Middleton Mount New visitor facilities

Members who were on the spring field trip had a chance to see the Trust's latest acquisition, the Norman motte and bailey castle at Middleton. During the visit steps up the castle motte, rather cleverly landscaped so that they were hardly visible, were being finished by the site warden, Herbie Ogden. He has since built a kissing gate at the entrance to improve disabled access, and a new interpretation panel has just been installed within the frame of the gate so that it can't be damaged by grazing cattle. This has all been generously funded by Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council.



The kissing gate at Middleton with the new interpretation panel located within the frame of the kissing gate to prevent damage by cattle grazing on the castle mound.

*Photo Peter Wade-Martins*





High level inspection of the gatehouse and windmill in September showed that while repairs were needed, there were no major defects.

*Photo David Watt*

## St Benets Abbey

### Specification for repairs in preparation

We continue with our three-part approach to St Benets, with:

- improved intellectual access with Tim Pestell's new guidebook (due for publication soon) and a series of site interpretation panels,
- better physical access with a small new car park, paths and a boardwalk to the site from the moorings,
- repairs to the gatehouse, windmill, church and precinct wall.

With a grant offer from English Heritage, a full condition survey of all the above-ground structures is now well under way. This has involved a high level inspection of the gatehouse and windmill by David Watt which showed that while some repairs are needed, no major structural problems could be found. Peter Wade-Martins and Stephen Heywood, the Trust's historic buildings adviser, also had fun enjoying the view! It is only the very eroded sections of precinct wall around the north and east sides of the abbey which are in poor condition.

The St Benets Project is in many ways an almost exact parallel to the Binham Project, and we hope that a grant application to the Heritage Lottery Fund in due course will be successful. We will have to see what impact the diversion of substantial H.L.F. funds to the Olympic Games will have on heritage projects like ours.



The view from the top of the tower.

*Photo David Watt*



A chance to gain a high level view of the priory fishponds.

*Photo David Watt*

## Caistor Roman Town

### Phase 2 of Roman town walls

English Heritage has just offered a grant which will now enable us to draw up a specification for the outstanding repairs to the town walls at Caistor. In Phase 1 (completed in 2006) all of the north wall and a sample of the south wall were repaired. The specification for Phase 2 will cover the rest of the south wall, the lumps of dislodged masonry near the car park and the upstanding western bastion. We will be going out to tender for prices from contractors over the winter in the hope of raising the money for repairs next year.

DEFRA made a very generous contribution to the Phase 1 repairs, the largest they have ever offered for the conservation of an archaeological site in one of their Countryside Stewardship Schemes. We hope that once their current funding problems have been sorted out, they will be able to help again.



Evening view of the south wall of the Roman town. *Photo Sue White*

### Geophysics Phase 2

Following the completion of the exceptionally productive geophysical survey of the defended area of the town featured in the Spring Newsletter, the next stage of the Caistor Project will be a geophysical survey of the large field to the south. This contains the amphitheatre and some other-extra mural structures, so the results of this are awaited with considerable interest. If the survey takes place this autumn, we hope to produce the results in the Spring Newsletter.

### “Mobitours”

South Norfolk Council and a company called Mobitours have devised an audio tour of the site using mobile phones. Visitors will be encouraged to use their phones to dial a number and they will then have a choice of texts suitable for adults or for children. These have been written by Will Bowden, who runs the Caistor Project. At each location around the walk there will be a number to press to hear details of the site; for this there will be a fixed charge of £1.50 for the whole tour. It is a clever idea, and we look forward to its press launch, which is expected soon.

### Fieldwalking project

The many volunteers who have signed up to the Caistor Project will have an opportunity to help with a fieldwalking survey of Caistor and surrounding parishes over the winter. Volunteers who have offered to help will be hearing from Will Bowden shortly.

*Text by Peter Wade-Martins Design by Sue White*

## The Great Hall

### New tenant

After the building has stood empty for two years, a new tenant is about to move into the Great Hall in Oak Street, Norwich. He is Nicholas Warns, an architect specialising in the conservation of historic buildings, particularly churches, and he will make an ideal tenant of our medieval hall-house. His firm looks after about 70 churches in East Anglia, and his clients include the Norfolk Churches Trust, the Norwich Historic Churches Trust and the Friends of Friendless Churches



The Great Hall, Oak Steet, Norwich.

*Photo Peter Wade-Martins*

### New Trust leaflet

The Trust has just produced a fresh promotion leaflet which will be distributed with this newsletter. It has been sponsored by Cozens-Hardy LLP, the Trust's solicitors, and designed by Trevor Ashwin. The cover picture is of the south-east bastion of the Roman fort at Burgh Castle, and other pictures in the leaflet feature South Creake hillfort, St Benet's Abbey, Caistor Roman town and Binham Priory. We hope it will convey in a relatively few words the aims and achievements of the Trust and will encourage new members to join. Donations and subscriptions can be enhanced by 22% under the Gift Aid Scheme. Existing members are especially asked to remember the Trust in their wills.

