

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST SPRING NEWSLETTER 2006



Members of the Norfolk Archaeological Trust and Norfolk and the Norwich Archaeological Society during the annual field visit to Burgh Castle and Berney Arms on the *Southern Belle* on 25th May. Burgh Castle is just visible on the skyline.

Photo Peter Wade-Martins

In this newsletter we can announce that the Trust has just acquired the Norman motte and bailey castle at Middleton, near Kings Lynn and that a potentially very significant Roman Town Research Project will start at Caistor St Edmund this year.

Burgh Castle

Members will remember that our last attempt to obtain lottery funding for improved visitor facilities at Burgh Castle was not successful because the HLF were not willing to pay for the new access road, car park and small information building opposite the church. Since then we have identified a fund, the Rural Enterprise Scheme run by Defra, which might be able to support the construction work, and an application to the Scheme for £524,000 was made in April. A decision is not expected before August. We have been told by Defra that funds in the scheme are limited, but we must just wait and see.

Should that be successful, then an application to the HLF for those aspects of the project (disabled access, education facilities, new site interpretation, geophysical survey and a borehole study of the reed beds, to enhance understanding of the Roman shoreline) will follow.



The chairman of the Trust, Matthew Martin, with the skipper of the *Southern Belle*, "Tug" Wilson.

Photo Peter Wade-Martins



An aerial photograph of Burgh Castle with Breydon Water behind, taken by Mike Page who has become well known for his aerial photographs of Norfolk published regularly in the Eastern Daily Press and for his two recent books, *A Broads-eye View* (2005) and *Norfolk Coast from the Air* (2006).

The picture above demonstrates how, with the collapse of the river bank opposite Burgh Castle and the subsequent expansion of the salt marshes, the fort is once again becoming a “coastal” defensive structure.

Middleton Mount

Site purchased

The Trust completed the purchase on 23rd May of this fine small motte and bailey castle at Middleton, near Kings Lynn. The site was previously in the ownership of the County Council, and it is already open to visitors. There is, however, scope for improving access and reviewing how good conservation management can keep the property in better condition. The motte and its surrounding ditch both survive very well, but the bailey earthwork was levelled at some time in the past. Its extent was ascertained by a study of air photographs and an excavation in 1987 before planning permission was granted for the surrounding housing estate. The outline of the bailey is now defined by the boundary of the property.

The full report by Trevor Ashwin on the site and the excavations can be found in *Norfolk Archaeology* XLIII (2001), pp. 645-656.

The legal costs of the transaction have been covered with a grant from Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council, and the site has cost the nominal sum of £1.

The Trust has been working very closely with Middleton Parish Council on this project, and it is fully anticipated that the Parish Council will wish to participate actively in the long-term management of the property. There is already a similar arrangement at the Tasburgh, where the hillfort is managed for the Trust by Tasburgh Parish Council.



Middleton Mount Norman motte and bailey castle being grazed by sheep this spring.
Photo Peter Wade Martins

Tasburgh Hillfort

There is seldom any news to report from Tasburgh, largely because everything ticks over quietly thanks to the Parish Council's good site management. This winter a new hedge was planted on the north side of the property by volunteers organised by Parish Council member Steve Beckett, and the plants were provided free by South Norfolk Council.

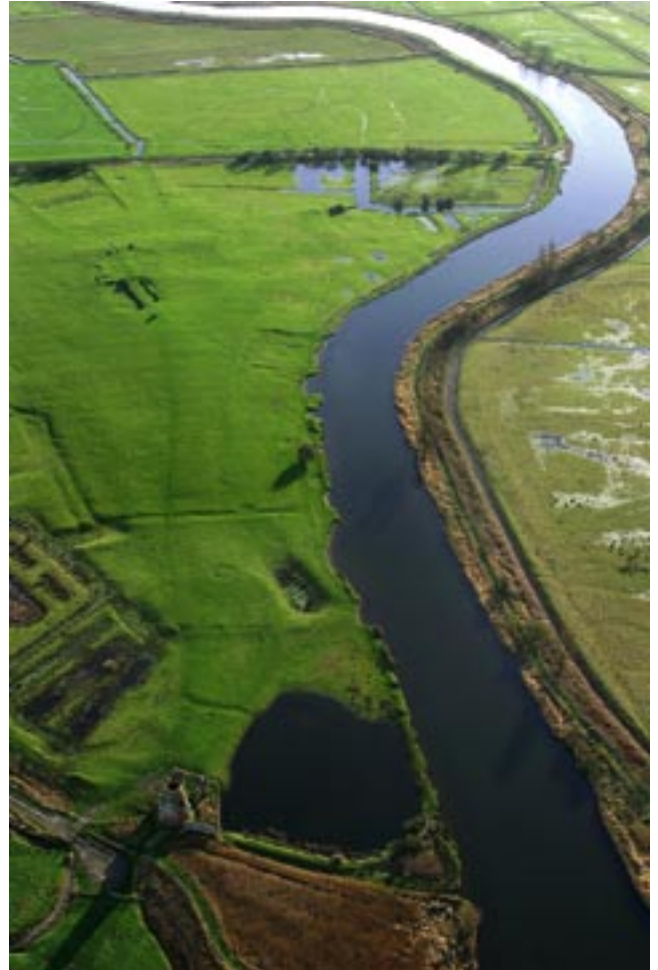
Our picture features Maurice Woodall with his dog Scruff and the Clerk of the Parish Council, Julie King. When the Trust acquired the property in 1994 we put in kissing gates designed for disabled access, and Maurice has been around the site in his electric wheelchair in all weathers almost every day, including Christmas days, ever since. The place is much appreciated as a community asset. The Parish Council keeps the fencing and gates in good repair and carries out regular risk assessments to make sure everything is in good order.



Maurice Woodall and Julie King, the Parish Council Clerk, at Tasburgh. *Photo Peter Wade-Martins*

St Benet's Abbey Further work on river defences delayed

We had expected that Broadland Environmental Services would start their own flood protection works, which involves raising the flood bank between the gatehouse and the river, in May, but we now gather that their contractors, Nuttalls, need more time to assemble their "kit". To them the "kit" is a pontoon big enough to hold a long-reach digger to offload the clay from barges onto the bank and a tracked dumper to carry the material to where it is needed. Until this is all done and the ground has settled, it is difficult for us to move onto the next stage in our own programme, which is to devise a detailed scheme to make the site more interesting and accessible to visitors. We nevertheless do still expect that all the earthmoving will be finished during the summer.

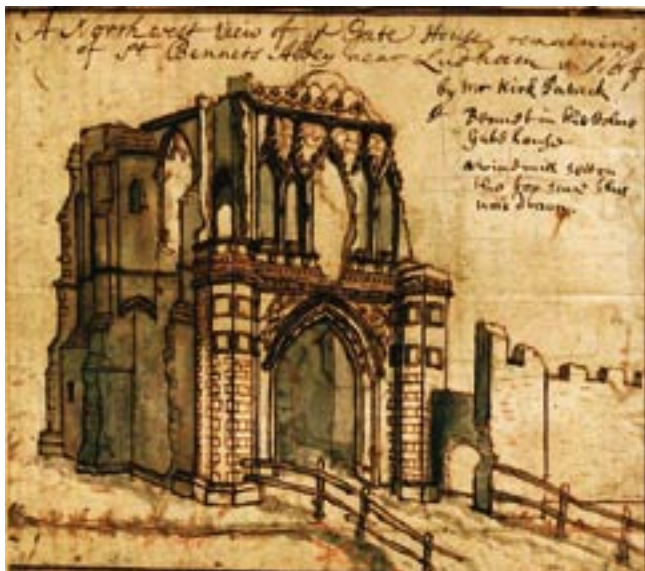


Two air photographs taken of St Benet's Abbey by Mike Page before (above) and after (below) the recent riverbank restoration work. The one **before** shows the indented line of the riverbank and the large pond close to the gatehouse, which was endangering the gatehouse foundations, and **after** with the riverbank restored and the pond filled with river dredgings, pumped in by the Broads Authority.



Early record of gatehouse located

An ink drawing by the early eighteenth-century antiquary John Kirkpatrick (1686-1728) has recently been located by Barbara Green in the Norfolk Record Office (Rye mss 17 Vol 6, p.1). It is the only original drawing so far known to survive of the gatehouse before the mid eighteenth century when the equally famous brick drainage pump was built in front of the entrance arch. One of the two engravings published by the Society of Antiquaries of the gatehouse in 1728 was presumably based on this drawing. In the drawing the carvings in the spandrels to either side of the arch can be seen, as can the upper story of the gatehouse which was removed when the windpump was built.



Caistor Roman Town

Caistor Roman Town Research Project

Will Bowden, Lecturer in Roman Archaeology at Nottingham University, has come up with very interesting proposals to start a research project on the Roman town this year. These have the full endorsement of the Trust and will be the subject of public consultations through two open meetings to be held on 14th June at 7.30pm at Caistor church and at South Norfolk Council offices at Long Stratton on 13th June at 5.45pm. It is proposed to have a press launch for the project in July and to keep everyone informed through a new illustrated panel in the car park and a website. There will be links to the web site from www.south-norfolk.gov.uk and from www.norfarchtrust.org.uk and this will be the best method of keeping everyone in touch with the project's progress.



Will Bowden, Lecturer in Roman Archaeology at Nottingham University, will lead the new Caistor Roman Town Research Project.

Photo Peter Wade-Martins

Outline of project research aims, to investigate :

- The origins of the town. Was it established on a new site or on a previously occupied Iron Age centre? Was a Roman military base its precursor?
- The development of the town in the later first and second century. Did the masonry buildings excavated in the 1930s replace wooden predecessors? What was the nature of the insulae where little is apparent from air photographs?
- The nature of the late Roman town and the date of the defensive wall.
- The end of the town and the nature of the post-Roman occupation. The significance of the Early and Middle Saxon cemeteries in the area will be of particular interest.

In addition, the project will explore the regional context of the town, both in terms of the Tas Valley area and further afield. It will also explore the town's national and international significance, particularly in terms of the ideological and functional role that towns fulfilled in Roman society. It should be a veritable feast, and will be well suited for the public to enjoy and for the specialists to digest and consider.

The project will run for several years, and in the first season there will be a geophysical survey of part the defended area of the town, and a series of borehole samples will be taken across the Tas Valley to look for palaeo-environmental evidence in the deeply buried waterlogged deposits and also to examine the history of the valley and its river bed. There is a suspicion that in the Roman period the river flowed close to the western defences, and this needs to be confirmed.

It may well be that the project will produce its own newsletter, in which case this will be distributed free to Trust members.

Binham Priory

Bullpen to be purchased

In March the Trust reached an agreement with William Wales, the owner of the farm buildings adjacent to the priory, to buy the reinforced concrete bullpen built onto the back of the medieval gatehouse. The plan is to demolish this structure to provide a better setting to the gatehouse by creating a grassed area backed by a new flint boundary wall. The purchase is being funded with grants from English Heritage and from the Woodroffe Benton Foundation. The end result should provide a much more attractive setting to the gatehouse, which is still the entrance to the priory, encouraging more visitors to this wonderful site.



Text by Peter Wade-Martins Design by Sue White