

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST SPRING NEWSLETTER 2007



Members of the Norfolk Archaeological Trust and the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society during the 2007 field visit to the Trust's latest acquisition at Middleton Mount.

Photo Peter Wade-Martins

In this newsletter we are able to announce a major lottery grant for the Trust's work at Binham Priory and the remarkable results of the geophysical survey of the whole of the walled area of the Roman town at Caistor.

Binham Priory

A partnership of the Norfolk Archaeological Trust, the Binham Priory Trust and Binham Parochial Church Council has been awarded a grant of up to £648,500 by the Heritage Lottery Fund. This represents 73% of the eligible costs of the Binham Priory Access and Conservation Project. It is altogether a most gratifying achievement for this collaborative venture involving the church community and the Archaeological Trust.

The elements of the project which directly involve the Trust are:

- conservation of the ruined medieval gatehouse and precinct wall,
- a new interpretation panel at the gatehouse,
- the study and publication of the finds, including the architectural stonework, from the 1930s' excavations which were put into store as war broke out and never properly examined,
- display of some of this material in new showcases in the church.

The Trust has also been offered matched funding for the work on the gatehouse and precinct wall by English Heritage.

Alongside this, the church community will be:

- building a new entrance and toilets for the church within the footprint of the north aisle demolished in the nineteenth century,
- improving the paths to the church and the cloisters.

Enhanced intellectual access to the priory will be provided by a set of fresh interpretation panels in the cloisters and the ruined east end of the priory church by English Heritage and by a range of educational initiatives being organised by Binham PCC and Binham Local History Group. This will all stretch beyond the confines of the priory to include self-guided walks around the historic core of the village and longer walks and cycle routes to other places of interest in the area.



The ruins of Binham Priory owned by the Norfolk Archaeological Trust and in the care of English Heritage.

Photo Peter Wade Martins

It is, no doubt, the strong conservation element to the project and the very fruitful partnership between the Trust and the wider Binham community which attracted the Heritage Lottery Fund to make such a generous offer. There is still match funding of £80,000 to be found before the whole project can be completed.



David Frost, Chairman of Binham Parochial Church Council, with the Heritage Lottery Fund sign to be erected on the scaffolding while conservation work is in progress.

Photo Peter Wade Martins

The contract with the HLF has been signed and we are now waiting for their approval to start work. The first sign of activity will be the demolition of the relatively modern shed and reinforced concrete bull pen embedded in the gatehouse and the erection of scaffolding around the gatehouse. In this first year we hope to complete the conservation of the gatehouse and make a good start on the precinct wall.



Binham Priory gatehouse, owned and managed by the Trust, where conservation of the stonework will soon begin.

Photo Peter Wade Martins

This close co-operation between the Archaeological Trust, the local community and English Heritage is surely one of the best possible ways to organise conservation and promote heritage awareness in the county.

St Benet's Abbey Guidebook completed

An entirely new guidebook to the abbey has been written by Tim Pestell for publication in the Trust's guidebook series. It will be a little more substantial than our guidebooks to the Roman town at Caistor and the Roman fort at Burgh Castle and it represents the fruits of much new research on the abbey by Tim. He covers the evidence from documents, old illustrations of the upstanding remains, finds from the site and a detailed survey of the earthworks. There will also be a fine new artist's reconstruction by Sue White based on an air photograph taken by Derek Edwards in 1989.

Car park and site access

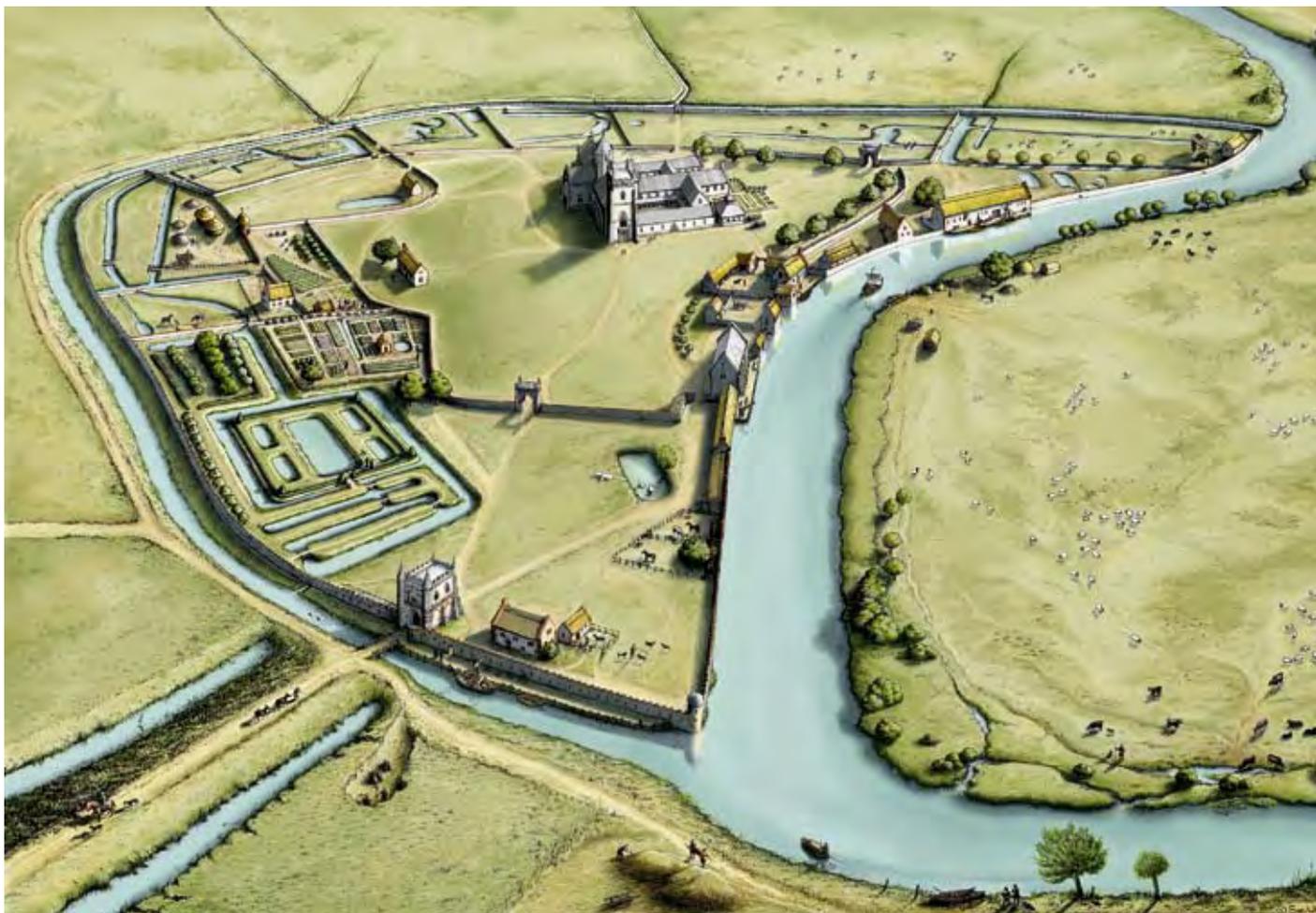
At the same time, the Trust has commissioned a landscape architect, Suzanne Chisnell, to design a car park and access paths from the car park and the nearby river moorings to the gatehouse. There will also be a new interpretation scheme with site panels linked to the guidebook. Once consultations are complete, we will submit a planning application for the car park, paths and interpretation panels and grant applications to various funding bodies.

Stonework conservation

Conservation of the medieval gatehouse and precinct wall is needed, as it is at Binham Priory. English Heritage has just agreed in principle to fund the specification for these repairs.

Site wardening

Keeping a site tidy and in good order is a necessary part of ownership, and it is very pleasing to report that the Broads Authority Ranger Service has offered to do all this for the Trust at St Benets. Volunteer wardens will cut the grass around the gatehouse and keep the nettles down around the abbey church, they will pick up litter and check the whole site regularly for health and safety issues. The Trust is most grateful to the Broads Authority for this generous offer.



The new artist's reconstruction of St Benets Abbey by Sue White will be a key feature of the new guidebook.

Burgh Castle

A fresh look at access options

Since it has become clear that it is not possible to raise the substantial funds needed for a car park near the church and the new road to it from Butt Lane, we have had to rethink entirely how to provide better access to the site. The Trust has always said that any alternative schemes must have the full support of the local community, so the Parish Council called a public meeting in the village in November to allow the Trust to present fresh ideas for discussion. A lively debate took place, and there was complete agreement that we should try for a smaller car park directly off Butt Lane which won't require a long access road.



The public meeting held on 27th November 2006 in Burgh Castle village hall to discuss with local residents how best to provide improved access and car parking to the monument without blocking local roads. *Photo by Sue White*



The rector of Burgh Castle, the Rev. John Quinn, and the secretary of the Parochial Parish Council, Maureen Grey, are both enthusiastic about the idea of making the north aisle of Burgh Castle church into an interpretation area for the history of the Roman fort and its surroundings. *Photo by Peter Wade-Martins*

We are now seeking funding for a landscape architect to design the car park and the disabled access paths from the car park to the monument. At the same time the Parochial Church Council has suggested that we could use the north aisle of the church as a display area. In many ways this echoes the Binham Priory project. A conversion of the north aisle into a display area also fits well the aims of the Open Churches Project being run by the Norwich diocese to encourage people to make more use of churches. The Diocesan Advisory Committee is currently being consulted while we progress the proposal for the smaller car park.

Caistor Roman Town

Geophysical survey

Following the trial survey carried out last July (see the Annual Report sent to members in the autumn) the Nottingham/UEA geophysics team, led by David Bescoby, has just completed a new survey of the whole of the walled area, except for the churchyard. The caesium vapour magnetometer he has used this time is the most sensitive seen on an archaeological site in Britain, and the results are a remarkable boost for the Caistor Project. They will certainly help to set the agenda for future research on the town.

The white areas pick out brick rubble and indicate which parts were built up with flint and brick buildings and which remained open or had timber structures on them. The main east-west street seems to have been densely occupied on both sides, and the forum can be seen in one insula to the south. The northwest and southwest corners appear to have been the least developed.

Most interest has focused on a semi-circular feature which may be a theatre to the east of the two temples excavated in the 1930s. The next stage is to survey the large field to the south of the walled area where the amphitheatre was found by air photography some years ago.

Special thanks are due to the many volunteers who turned out in pairs day after day to assist with the geophysics by setting out measuring tapes and moving ranging poles.

Caistor volunteers

Volunteers are an important part of the Caistor project. About sixty people signed up to help last year, and twenty or so attended three training sessions held in the Norwich Castle Study Centre in October. The volunteers were given a brief introduction to Roman Britain and then had the opportunity to handle and discuss material from the 1930s' excavations.



The 2007 geophysical survey of the walled area of Caistor Roman town. The white areas mostly represent brick rubble.

Plan provided by Will Bowden

The large white blobs near the northern perimeter are probably pottery kilns. Alongside and just to the east of the main north-south street there is a row of smaller white spots set at regular intervals right across the town. These were first picked up in the 2006 survey and probably represent the iron collars on wooden pipes for the town's water supply.

Text by Peter Wade-Martins Design by Sue White

Middleton Mount

Members of the Trust who came on the 2007 field trip had a chance to see the Trust's latest purchase at Middleton Mount, where the castle motte and surround ditch are superbly preserved. The new steps up the motte, a replacement interpretation panel and a disabled access kissing gate are being funded largely with a generous grant from West Norfolk Council. This demonstrates well the two main aims of the Trust: good conservation and improved public access to the county's archaeology.