



St Benets Abbey gatehouse

Photo by Sue White

St Benets Abbey This is our newest acquisition; the purchase from the Crown Estate was only completed a day before the Trust's excursion by river to the monument on 30th May 2002 (cover photo). The large 36-acre (14.5 hectare) D-shaped enclosure contains some of the finest monastic earthworks in Norfolk, and it is the only medieval monastery in the county with a pre-Conquest foundation. In date it is similar to Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk and Ely in Cambridgeshire, but unlike these other two it is in the remotest location imaginable. That is why its preservation is so good.

The threat here is severe damage to the river bank caused by the wash from holiday cruisers. Discussions are now in hand with the Environment Agency and other bodies so see what can be done to halt the damage.

The famous abbey gate and windmill were not a part of the purchase because they are owned separately by the Norwich Diocese. However, discussions with the Diocese about these areas are in hand.



The ruined gatehouse at Binham Priory.

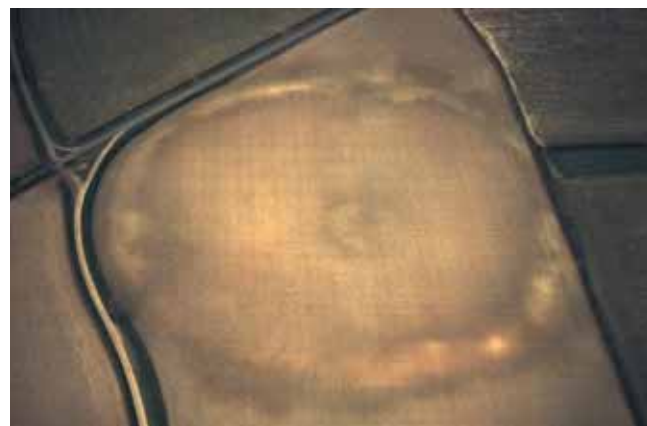
Text by Peter Wade-Martins Design by Sue White

Photo by Sue White

Forthcoming acquisitions

Over the coming months two more acquisitions are in prospect:

Bloodgate Hill, South Creake, hillfort This circular Iron Age hillfort is being eroded by constant ploughing, with fresh material being brought to the surface each year. An understanding has been reached, subject to contract and to funding, to buy the field from the owners so that it can be put down to grass to prevent further disturbance. But, before the site is grassed over, there will be a small-scale excavation. A car park will be built and there will be a low-key interpretation scheme drawing upon the results of the excavation. The Heritage Lottery Fund has offered three quarters of project costs, and the outcomes of other grant applications are awaited.



Air photograph of the plough-damaged Iron Age hillfort at Bloodgate Hill South Creake where the Trust hopes to embark on a major conservation project. The Heritage Lottery Fund has offered £94,900 out of the £126,500 needed to conserve the site.

Photo by Derek Edwards, Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service

Binham Priory gatehouse The 1933 purchase of the priory did not, for some reason, include the well-preserved remains of the gatehouse and precinct wall. Agreement has just been reached in principle with the farmer, William Wales, to purchase them from him, and English Heritage have offered a generous grant to cover most of the costs. Once the gatehouse is under our control, we will have all the ivy removed and we will then carry out an assessment to see what is needed to put them both in good repair.

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST REPORT TO MEMBERS 2001/2



Members of the Trust and the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society at St Benets Abbey on 30th May 2002.

Photo by Sue White

This is the first report of the Trust's work to be distributed to members, so it seems appropriate to explain the origins of the Trust and its role as we set out our agenda for the future.

The Trust is 79 years old this year!

Origins and Objects of the Trust

The history of the Norfolk Archaeological Trust goes back to May 1923 when its Memorandum and Articles were approved. Our founding fathers (they were all male) created an organisation then which should be able to adapt as the world of archaeology changes over the years. They included, amongst others, well-known antiquarians and archaeologists such as Edward Beloe, Leonard Bolingbrooke, W.G. Clarke, Basil Cozens-Hardy, H.L. Bradfer-Lawrence and Duleep Singh, names which should ring down the generations for their innovative thinking. They showed great foresight in creating a county trust with objectives which still make it unique in Britain today.

The Objects of the Trust as agreed then were wide-ranging. They allowed it to promote field surveys, organise excavations and research and the recording and preservation of archaeological sites and finds. The Trust is empowered to acquire or lease sites and buildings and acquire artefacts which it can repair and preserve for public benefit.

The Trust was an inspired concept, well ahead of its time, and it was followed three years later by the Norfolk Naturalists' Trust (now the Norfolk Wildlife Trust) which has a similar role for nature conservation. The Archaeological Trust made great strides in the 1930s, but in the post-war years it was slow to make full use of its powers in the way that the Wildlife Trust has since done. However, there is no doubt that we are making good progress now!

The Trust so far

Until the Archaeological Trust bought land at Caistor St Edmund in 1992 to safeguard parts of the Roman town, it had focused its efforts almost entirely on owning and protecting a small number of historic buildings. The early focus on historic buildings in the 1920s and 1930s was the result of a perception at the time that most archaeology was about historic buildings. Many field monuments had then not been identified, and some classes of monument, like deserted medieval villages, had not even been recognised.



Bishop Bonners Cottages, Dereham

Photo by Sue White

Since then Bishop Bonners Cottages in Dereham (given by Walter Rye in 1931) were transferred to Dereham Town Council in 1981, and the Greenland Fishery in King's Lynn was passed to the King's Lynn Preservation Trust in 1998. We now own just four buildings, three in Norwich, Garsett House in St Andrew's Plain, the Great Hall in Oak Street and Pykerell's House in St Mary's Plain, and a cottage in Field Dalling (given by Basil Cozens-Hardy in 1938).

The role of the Trust in building conservation has since been rather overtaken by the formation of a number of conservation bodies who care for historic buildings, such as the Norfolk Historic Buildings Trust and the King's Lynn Preservation Trust. Since its formation in 1973 the Norfolk Archaeological Unit has taken on the running of most archaeological field projects in the county. So by the 1990s it had become clear that the role of the Trust needed to be re-examined.

The way ahead

Strategic review

The time was clearly right to review and to redefine the work of the Trust, as all organisations need to do from time to time. So, the Trust's Council carried out a strategic review over the winter of 2000/1 to see how best it could contribute to the archaeology of Norfolk in the twenty-first century. The Trust needed to have its own clear objectives and a role which did not duplicate the work of other bodies in the county. Its greatest asset was that it had experience of property ownership and management. The outcome of this review, which was agreed at the Council's January 2001 meeting, can be summarised as follows:

* *The Trust will implement a long-term programme of acquiring and conserving archaeological sites, especially in the countryside.* These will include earthwork monuments in need of sympathetic management, sites being damaged by arable farming and ruined buildings in need of care. While planning authorities can now control unsuitable development, there are few safeguards for sites on farmland. Scheduling does not stop constant ploughing if a field is already being ploughed. There is much in this area which needs to be done.

* *Acquisition of selected sites should:*

- ensure permanent preservation of the archaeological evidence,
- give the public a better opportunity to see and enjoy sites and monuments not currently accessible,
- provide opportunities for site interpretation, linked wherever possible to museum displays.

* *When a property is purchased, as far as possible funds to cover the purchase will be generated as grants from other organisations.* Clearly, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme and grants from councils and other trusts will be important here. There was a time when English Heritage could contribute too, but they seem to have little money left for monument conservation now, except in special cases (as at Binham - see below).

* *Sites should either generate sufficient income to meet their own running costs, or there should be management partnerships with other organisations.* At Caistor the Roman town is managed for us by South Norfolk Council, and at Tasburgh hillfort the Parish Council is in day-to-day control. It is particularly good when parish councils are able to be involved, as it enables them to contribute actively to the management of their own heritage.

* *The Trust tends towards the view that there is little need to own historic buildings now.* They are well protected through the planning system, by various other trusts and by amenity societies which did not exist in 1923.

* *Two of the Norwich buildings and the Field Dalling cottage will probably be sold, but only when they fall vacant.* In the meantime there will be absolutely no suggestion that the current tenants should leave until they wish to do so.

* *The money from the sale of properties, as and when this is occurs, will be used to provide a top-up fund for the purchase of endangered field monuments.*

The key to our future

Our new programme can now be summarised in three key words: **conservation**, **access** and **interpretation**. This gives us a clear path for the future, which should in the long term provide considerable public benefit.

More information on the internet

The Trust has its own website, www.norfarchtrust.org.uk, and, as many people now have access to the internet, there seems little point in duplicating in this report information which can be found there. Anyone wishing to visit our properties is strongly advised to download information before they go. More sites will be added to the website as they are acquired.

Information leaflet

The Trust has recently started to distribute a new leaflet (copy enclosed), and we hope that this will encourage more people to join the Trust to support its work. At this stage, however, Trust Council has decided not to go in for an all-out membership drive, taking the view that it would be better to grow slowly and organically as our role increases.

Bequests

Members of the Trust and others can lend enormous support to archaeological conservation in Norfolk by legacy. Have you considered leaving something to the Trust in your will? Do think about it. Your solicitor will advise you further.



Caistor Roman town

Sites in Trust ownership

The Trust owns five archaeological properties:

Binham Priory This well-known monument was purchased by the Trust in 1933, and it was then placed in state guardianship. Excavations of the cloisters and surrounding buildings by the Ministry of Works ran for several years in the 1930s, but it seems that war then intervened. No report was ever published, except for a few newspaper articles. We have asked English Heritage, as successors to the Ministry of Works, to see if they can find the files from this period in the hope that some records of the work might survive. Meanwhile the artefacts from the site still lie in their original packaging in the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service stores at Gressenhall, and have never been studied.



Binham Priory Church

Photo By Sue White

There is fairly minimal site interpretation at present and we will be presenting proposals to English Heritage for the site finds to be studied and to make the monastic remains more informative. Signs on the walls, like "monks' dorter above", are hardly user friendly! But the monument is under English Heritage control, and there is little we can do without their support and approval.

Caistor St Edmund Roman town 120 acres (48 hectares) of the Roman capital of northern East Anglia came to the Trust partly from a bequest in 1984 and partly from purchase in 1992. The site was opened to the public by the chairman of the Countryside Commission in 1995.

An attractive guidebook, *Venta Icenorum* by John Davies (2001) price £3, is available through bookshops and it is also available free to new members of the Trust when they join.

In May of this year a consultants' report, commissioned by South Norfolk District Council, suggesting a radical upgrading of visitor facilities, was released to the press. This led to headlines in the *Eastern Daily Press* such as "Visitors' Centre to be a national attraction". However, it is important to emphasise that no decisions on the recommendations have yet been taken. Indeed, everybody who might have a view about the scheme should be properly consulted first. Public consultations by South Norfolk Council are due to start this autumn.

The Trust, while determined to discharge its obligations to conserve the site, is also committed to playing a full and constructive role in helping to formulate policies for the future of Caistor. The outcome of the consultations will be the starting point for further discussions.

Tasburgh hillfort, near Long Stratton The Trust bought 16 acres (6.5 hectares) of the site in 1994 to stop damaging cultivation of the western rampart. The eroded earthwork is likely to be Iron Age, although it is possible that it is contemporary with the ninth-century Danish invasion of the area or its subsequent re-conquest. Only excavation will provide an answer. Meanwhile the field with its interpretation panel provides a very welcome public open space in the village centre.

Burgh Castle Roman fort This is by far the most dramatic of the Trust's properties. The remarkably well-preserved Roman fort set within 90 acres (37 hectares) was acquired in 1995 to stop further cultivation of the very sensitive area around the fort and to improve the setting of this most remarkable monument. The walls are in English Heritage guardianship. The Trust's guidebook to the three Roman Saxon Shore forts in Norfolk at Burgh Castle, Caister-on-Sea and Brancaster, *Outposts of the Roman Empire* by David Gurney, is currently being printed with the help of grants from English Heritage, the National Trust and Great Yarmouth Borough Council. This new guidebook may well be on sale by Christmas.

The fort has one of the finest views in Norfolk overlooking reed beds (owned by the Trust), the Halvergate Marshes and the Berney Arms windmill. Marsh Harriers now regularly breed in the reed beds, and it seems at times as though the property is as popular with bird watchers as it is with archaeologists.

The Trust has just submitted a substantial bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to create a new access road, car park, information building and a site interpretation scheme. The scheme has been carefully designed so as to have minimal impact on the monument. The creation of disabled access facilities will also be an important feature of the project.



Part of the south wall and the south-east bastion of the Roman fort at Burgh Castle. A nineteenth-century engraving of this bastion is now the Trust's logo.

Photo by Peter Wade-Martins