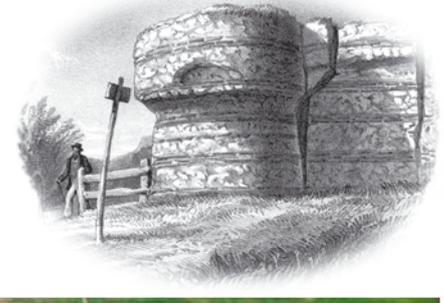


NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

SPRING NEWSLETTER

2011

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



Air photograph of Caistor looking west taken by Mike Page in July 2010 showing Dunston Field outlined in red between the River Tas and the railway line beyond.

In this Newsletter we are able to report the purchase of additional land at the Roman town at Caistor, the start of a 50-year lease of the Carmelite Friary at Burnham Norton and the acquisition of the Fiddler's Hill Bronze Age round barrow near Binham.

Caistor

Purchase of additional land

It is very satisfying to announce that following an intensive fund raising campaign over the winter, we have raised the money to buy an additional 55 acres of the Roman town on the west bank of the River Tas. This has been made possible thanks to a generous grant from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and substantial contributions from English Heritage and South Norfolk Council. The breakthrough came on 15th February when the Fund agreed to contribute 82% of the purchase price. As far as we know this is the first time the Fund has grant-aided the acquisition of an archaeological site. Normally the Fund assists with the purchase of works of art or important country houses, so this is a great step forward for archaeology as well as for Caistor.

We still needed some match funding, and this came in the form of a £40,000 grant from English Heritage and a £20,000 grant from South Norfolk Council. These are impressive figures at a time when both organisations are making major cuts in their budgets.

The land, called "Dunston Field", has long been known as the source of many metal detector finds particularly from the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods. The importance of the field can be summarised, mainly through these detector finds and the fine cropmark evidence as follows:

Iron Age coins and brooches attest to pre-Roman occupation.

The field contains the final stretch of Roman road up from Colchester which crossed the road heading west out of the west gate of the town. There is strong evidence of Roman occupation here focused on the crossroads.

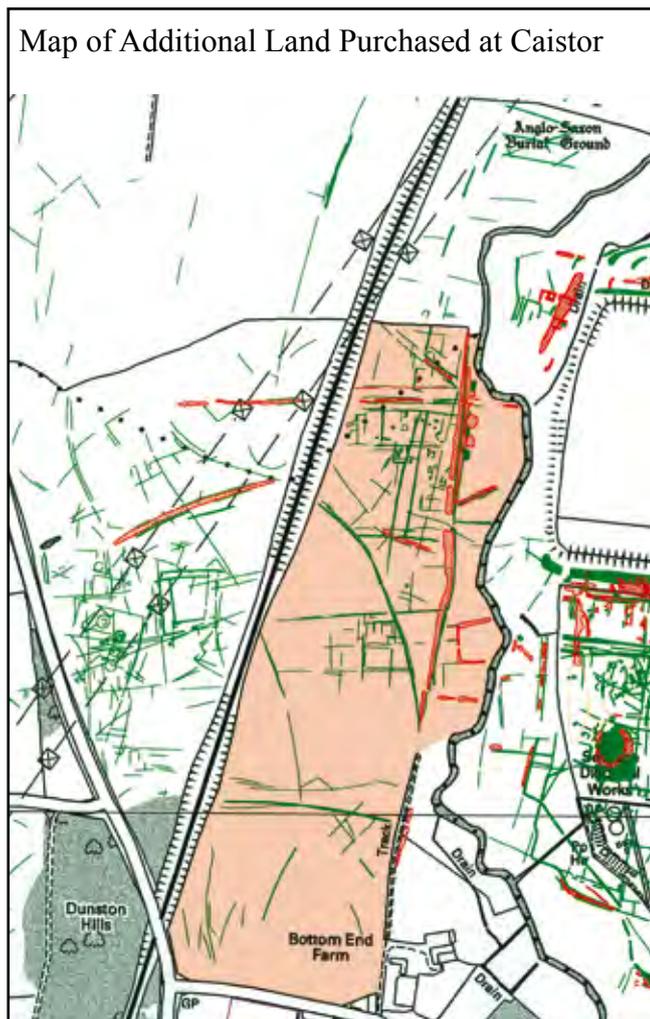
Rectangular cropmarks over the northern part of the field suggest Early Saxon "sunken featured" buildings, although artefacts from this period, as you would expect, are scarce.

There is rich evidence for a Middle Saxon revival of the town, and probably a market centre, here on this bank of the river before there was a shift to Norwich in the Late Saxon period. With 17 coins of the late 7th and early 8th centuries, the field has

produced one of the most important collections of Middle Saxon metalwork found in East Anglia. This evidence when taken together does suggest the possibility of continuity of occupation from the Iron Age to at least the 8th century.

Our urgent task now is to put the land down to grass and to bring the loss of archaeological evidence from illegal metal detecting on Dunston Field to an end. It is our intention to provide public access as soon as possible to this new area once grass is established. At the same time we should review the on-site interpretation to include not just the new land but also the results of Will Bowden's research project. This will need to take account of the results of both his excavations and the remarkable geophysical surveys by Dave Bescoby.

The view across the valley from the high land near the railway line will give a whole new perspective on the town. This purchase will bring the area open for public access on both sides of the valley up to 175 acres. The property is now one step closer to being an archaeology park with the Roman town and the River Tas at its centre.



A plan of the cropmarks in Dunston Field, prepared as a part of the National Mapping Programme, showing Roman roads and other hard features in red and ditches and other cut features in green. The main concentration of cropmarks lies at the north end of the field around the Roman crossroads.

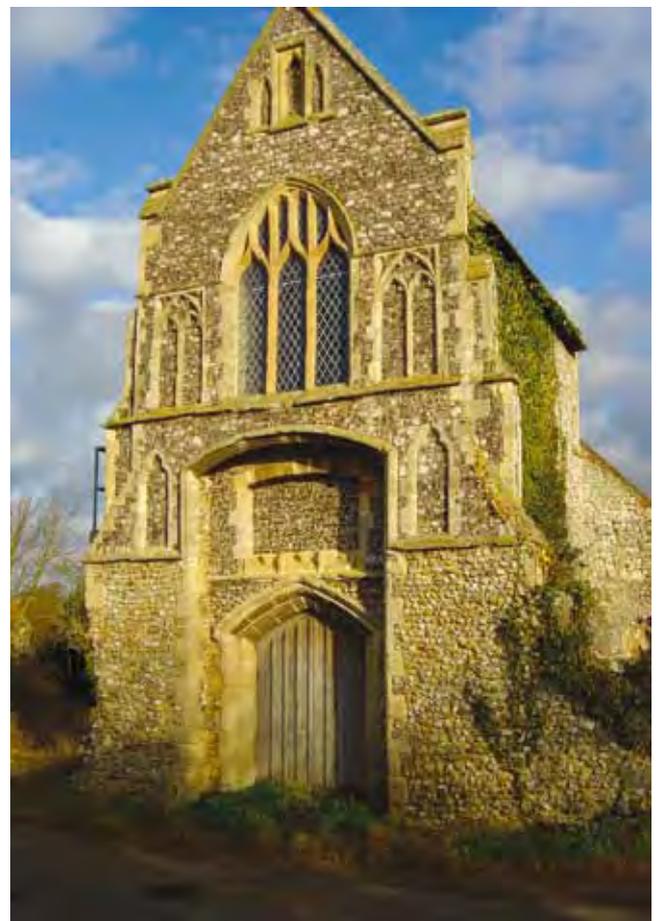
Further repairs to the town walls

As we reported in the autumn Newsletter, the Trust has completed another season of conservation work on the north wall to combat ongoing frost damage. Since then the wall has been well covered with tarpaulins all winter to protect it from the severe weather while the mortar has had time to set. Thank goodness it was so well protected during the very low temperature we experienced in November and December! Let's hope all is well when the tarpaulins come off once the frosts are over.

2010 excavations

The second season of excavations by Will Bowden in two areas within the Late Roman defences took place last summer, and the results are presented in a separate supplement with this newsletter.

Burnham Norton Carmelite Friary



The gatehouse and west wall of the church of Burnham Norton Carmelite Friary now in the care of the Trust under a 50-year lease from the Holkham Estate.

Trust takes on the lease

The Trust has just taken on a 50-year lease from the Holkham Estate of Burnham Norton Friary. The County Council has relinquished its guardianship of the gatehouse and west wall of the church, and so we now have the whole precinct directly under Trust management which should greatly facilitate on-site presentation and monument care.



Stephen Heywood, Norfolk County Council's historic buildings adviser, at Burnham Norton Carmelite Friary discussing with the building surveyor and contractor the right mortar mix to be used during the conservation work on the precinct wall.

Conservation work in hand

As a part of the process of releasing their guardianship of the standing remains at Burnham Norton, Norfolk County Council is paying for the precinct wall to be fully conserved so it can all be handed over to us in good order. At the time of writing the repairs to the wall have just begun. We plan later this year, after the bird nesting season is over, to clear the dense scrub from the church earthworks. When Natural England has funds available again, we will fence in the whole meadow to allow grazing of the earthworks while at the same time providing public access linked to new information panels.

Meanwhile, the Friary has a beautiful little gatehouse, and it is well worth a visit by any Trust members who have not yet seen it. The Friary lies on the east side of the back lane running from Burnham Market north towards the coast.

Fiddler's Hill

Bronze Age round barrow to be transferred to the Trust

So far the Trust has not had in its ownership any Bronze Age sites, although we do have the Iron Age hillforts at Bloodgate Hill, South Creake and at Tasburgh. The County Council has just offered to give us this well preserved round barrow. It lies close to the road between Binham and Warham and on the boundary between the two parishes. Bronze Age burial mounds are seldom spectacular, and this one is better preserved than most.



The Fiddler's Hill round barrow and picnic site.

Burgh Castle

The new car park at Burgh Castle has been a great success, although there has been a delay in providing the information panels to go in the specially constructed shelters. However, a fresh contract has just been issued to Trevor and Imogen Ashwin to provide the panels, and they should be in place by August. Meanwhile, English Heritage has installed their own attractive panels close to the Roman fort, and the one near the south-east bastion (the bastion used for the Trust's logo) is illustrated here.



One of the new English Heritage interpretation panels at Burgh Castle.

Site vandalism

Meanwhile our site wardens, supported by the police, have had to cope with a stream of illegal campers who build bonfires and leave large quantities of broken bottles and litter behind them, particularly at weekends. We even found recently that someone had lit a bonfire close to the walls scorching the Roman masonry! Burgh Castle is such an incredibly beautiful place that it is not surprising that people like to go there to enjoy themselves.



Vandalism at Burgh Castle: someone thought it was fun to light a bonfire against the walls of the Roman fort.



Air photograph by Mike Page showing the fishponds, gatehouse and windmill at St Benets Abbey. The pond between the gatehouse and the river has been filled in since this photo was taken to protect the foundations of the gatehouse from flooding.

St Benets Abbey

Bid submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Our “Round 2” bid was submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund in early March, and we now await their decision in June. This project will cover conservation of the gatehouse and windmill, the abbey church and precinct wall, the construction of a small car park and disabled access from the car park and from the river moorings to the gatehouse. We are now close to signing a legal agreement with the surrounding estate for visitors to be able to drive down to the site in daylight hours, subject to the needs of farming operations.

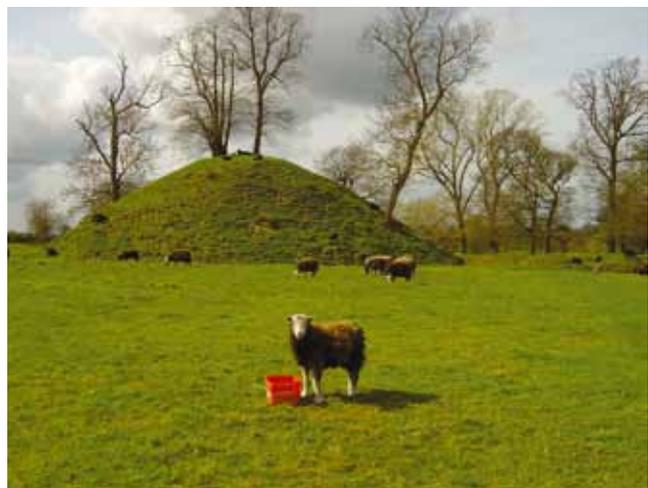


The wherry Albion on its way past St Benets Abbey overlooked by fishermen.

Our aim, however, is to encourage access by river and on foot, in other words by “green access”, as far as possible. There will be a series of information panels and leaflets and a new website which will allow visitors to download an audio tour. Schools learning and training workshops are all to be important parts of the project.

We know that there will be a lot of strong competition for this funding, but if we are successful conservation of the abbey church will start in the summer.

Middleton Mount



The Norfolk Wildlife Trust's Flying Flock of rare breeds of sheep at Middleton Mount medieval motte and bailey castle.