

# NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST ANNUAL REPORT 2013

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The ceremony twenty years ago when Sir John Johnson, Chairman of the Countryside Commission, opened Caistor to the public. From right to left were Sir John Johnson, Peter-Wade-Martins, Rosemary Tilbrook, Chair of South Norfolk Council, Geoffrey Barrett, Chair of the Archaeological Trust and Roy Durrant, Lord Mayor of Norwich.

## 90th Anniversary Issue

**It is ninety years since the Trust was started with its first public meeting on 2nd March 1923. It is also twenty years since Caistor was opened to the public. This last year has been a particularly active one for the Trust, and there is much to celebrate. The additional land on the west bank of the river at Caistor has been opened to the public, the conservation work has been completed at St Benets Abbey and the new project, being run in partnership with the Holkham Estate, has started at Castle Acre Priory. During the summer we have organised a series of public events at St Benets Abbey which have been particularly successful in making the property relevant to a wider audience.**



A civic portrait of Basil Cozens-Hardy, the Norwich solicitor who founded the Norfolk Archaeological Trust in 1923, taken when he was Norwich City Sheriff in 1935.



## Caistor Roman Town

### Our 20th anniversary at Caistor

It is twenty years since the Roman town was opened to the public in a ceremony performed by Sir John Johnson, chairman of the Countryside Commission, on 10th June 1993 (photograph on front cover). Most of the land had been purchased with funds from English Heritage, the County Council and South Norfolk Council, and the site conservation work had been funded by the Countryside Commission. All these bodies were present at the opening ceremony. Since then, Natural England has continued the generous support previously given by the Countryside Commission, and South Norfolk Council has worked closely with the Trust as our partners in managing the property.

It is very fitting that during this anniversary year Mike Page has taken the best colour pictures we have yet seen of the Roman town centre. The dry summer has shown up the Roman street system with great clarity.



The stone has just been cleaned, and the lettering re-cut and re-painted to commemorate the anniversary.



Mike Page (pictured left) with his Cessna 150, which he can fly and navigate himself while taking pictures out of the window, although he does admit he now more often has another pilot with him. His remarkably successful books *A Broads-eye View* (2005), *Norfolk Coast from the Air* (2006) and *Norfolk from the Air* (2009) have given people a whole new perspective on the Norfolk landscape in full colour. Quick emails to Mike have several times been followed by almost instant photographs of Trust properties when they were at their best.



This air photograph of Caistor, taken from the west on 18th July 2013 by Mike Page when soil moisture levels were exceptionally low, showed up the Roman street system and other features within the walled area with a level of detail we have not seen before in colour. Will Bowden thinks that the street grid can be no earlier than the 2nd century (perhaps c.120) with parts of it being even later. *Photo by Mike Page.*





The new footbridge over the River Tas, funded by Norfolk County Council's Community Construction Fund, was opened in July. Inset: female Banded Damoiselle flies perched on the bridge in the July sunshine.

### Access for all

In July we opened a new footbridge over the River Tas giving visitors access to a further 22 hectares on the west bank. This brings the area we are now protecting from cultivation and making available for research to some 60 hectares. The bridge was designed by Plandescil of Attleborough and constructed by Miles Waterscapes of Great Ashfield, near Bury St Edmunds.



The construction of the footbridge involved cutting foundations down through the valley deposits into the underlying gravel. The trenches were dug by consultant archaeologist Heather Wallis who clearly enjoyed the experience! With her was Dave Bescoby who has made a special study of the alluvial deposits in the valley. He reports that from about 1.2 m down to 1.8 m there is a deep organic-rich layer of silts and peats representing a river edge marsh dating from the late Iron Age to c. 4th century AD.



An information panel erected in the car park this summer, designed by Sue Walker White, provides a map and an aerial photograph by Mike Page showing the enlarged area open for public access as well as the locations of disabled access gates and the new footbridge over the Tas.

A new information board in the car park has been funded by a bequest we received from the late Mary Muir who particularly loved Caistor. This has a map which shows the new land open for public access and explains the initiatives we are taking to improve facilities for the disabled. It also outlines our proposals for a new site interpretation scheme which will incorporate the results of four years' excavation and survey carried out by the Caistor Roman Town Research Project.





In order to provide lasting stability to the Roman wall tops, a new layer of flints and lime putty is being added to provide better long-term bonding and improved protection against winter frosts.

### Wall repairs

Alongside our public access initiatives, we continue to work on the protection of the Roman town walls which have suffered from further frost damage despite our best efforts. We have removed the damaged wall capping put on seven years ago, in which quick-drying hydraulic lime was used. We are now trying again this time with a deeper layer of flints bonded with a slow-drying lime putty which takes longer to set but which should be more resistant to low temperatures and differential movement between the capping and the Roman mortar below. It is a question of trial and error until we have it right.

### Establishing a wild flower hay meadow on Dunston Field

With a grant of £6,000 from Natural England to buy seeds of native origin, we have started to establish the wild flower hay meadow on the west bank of the Tas. The intention here is to create a species-rich area, good for both flowering plants and ground-nesting birds, which will contrast with the intensive sheep grazing on the east bank. It will be necessary to cut the field regularly to encourage the sward to thicken and only allow it to grow as a hay crop in the third or fourth year. These wild flower meadows are difficult and slow to establish and need careful monitoring.



Dave Weaver, the Project Officer for Natural England, monitoring the germination of wild herbs and grasses sown in the autumn of 2012 on Dunston Field. For the herbs, yarrow, wild red clover and yellow rattle are doing well, but there is so far no sign of ox-eye daisies which usually never fail. For the wild grasses, sheep's fescue, crested dog's-tail, smaller cat's-tail and sweet vernal-grass are well established.

### Family Fun Day

On 25th May South Norfolk Council funded and organised a Family Fun Day, which was both enjoyable and informative. Hoards of excited children made paper swords and shields, watched Roman soldiers in action and learned from the Romans what life was like in Roman Britain. The children heard how the Romans built really good roads and even had central heating! There were also guided tours of the town for the adults, and it was good to see the site used so well as an educational resource.



Two Roman soldiers with Queen Boudicca looking on explained to the children about what it was like to live in the Roman period.



During the Family Fun Day at Caistor hundreds of children of all ages had a great time making swords and shields out of card and excavating finds from sand boxes.



## Castle Acre Priory

### Site conservation

We announced in the Spring Newsletter that the Trust is working closely with the Holkham Estate which owns Castle Acre priory to conserve those areas of the precinct which lie outside English Heritage guardianship. Work has just started on the precinct wall which is in places in poor condition, and the plan here is to have the whole wall, where it survives, fully conserved by October 2014.

The Trust then takes on the lease of the precinct meadows from the Holkham Estate. Our hope is that with time there can be fully a integrated conservation and interpretation scheme for whole monastic complex and its relationship to the adjacent medieval town and castle.



Clearance of trees and ivy at the start of conservation work on the priory precinct wall, which will continue until the autumn of 2014.



A clever system of water-filled weights has stabilised a leaning section of precinct wall while piles are driven in to support new buttresses.



Piles are driven in with compressed air to support new buttresses on the river-side section of precinct wall.



Parts of the precinct wall are remarkably well preserved. Much of it had never been seen by the present residents of Castle Acre until we started clearance.





A second donations box near the viewing platform overlooking the reedbeds and Halvergate Marshes, seen here in the early morning sunshine, has helped to boost donations towards the upkeep of the property.

## Burgh Castle

### Donations box

In the Spring Newsletter we reported that a donations box had been installed near the car park to help visitors who are not members of the Trust to contribute towards the upkeep of the property. Since then we have put in a second one beside the viewing platform overlooking the Halvergate Marshes, since this is the most popular place for people to sit quietly and take in the full beauty of the place. John Russell, the site warden who opens the boxes daily, reports that up to the end of August £472 has been collected from the two boxes. Because these are all donations, we will claim back an additional 25% Gift Aid from HMRC. The box near the viewing platform has been broken open once, but only once, which is quite encouraging!

## Burnham Norton Friary

### Understanding the friary

The earthworks of the friary have a strange plan which we don't yet understand. The gatehouse appears to be extremely close to the west end of the church and they both lie to the south of the cloisters. This is unusual and needs to be better explained in a new interpretation scheme for the site. We have recently been contacted by Dr Helen Clarke who is making a special study of Carmelite friaries. She believes that the Burnham Norton example is exceptionally well preserved, and it deserved to be further investigated. Her research can provide ideas for the new interpretation panel and for the site page on the Trust's website. She is being helped in

this by Dr Sally Francis, our volunteer warden who has lived locally since childhood and has a detailed knowledge of the local topography. The spring just to the north of Friary Cottage may well have been a sacred spring in the Middle Ages and it could explain the friary's unusual location, well away from an urban centre.



Dr. Salley Francis (left) and Dr Helen Clarke who are researching the history of Burnham Norton Friary for the Trust's website and new interpretation panel.





A vertical air photograph taken at 3,000 feet on 12th July showing the whole abbey site, with the gatehouse and windmill to the left (west), where conservation work was completed before Christmas 2012, and the abbey church in the middle on the highest part of the site. The area of brown grass represents the island on which the Anglo-Saxon monastery was founded. This was identified as the "Inner Court" by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments in their original 1994 earthwork survey. The fishponds and other earthwork water features lie within the later extension of the abbey precinct in the low-lying marshy ground. To the north around the edge of the whole site is the precinct wall which survives in places. *Photo by Mike Page.*

## St Benets Abbey

### Windmill and gatehouse

R. & J. Hogg, our building contractors, completed their work at the abbey and moved their team to Castle Acre Priory on 20th August. All those who have seen their work at St Benets have been particularly impressed.

The windmill and gatehouse were finished by the end of 2012, and they both look breathtaking in the sunshine. The Broads Authority landscaping team has laid disabled access paths from the farm track around and into the gatehouse. The paths might look a bit severe for a while, but they will soon weather down. The path around the front of the gatehouse has been made of the same plastic re-enforcing mesh which we used at Burgh Castle to avoid making formal pathways. Grass seed will be sown into the mesh in the autumn.



A low-level air photo of the gatehouse and windmill, with all the conservation work and the disabled access paths complete and the new landscaping ready for grass seed. *Photo by Mike Page, who must have been close to loosing his aircraft wheels in the process!*



Full credit was given on site both to R. & J. Hogg, the building contractors, for their skilled craftsmanship, to David Watt, the building surveyor who supervised the work and to the Heritage Lottery Fund without whose very generous funding the project would not have been possible.





The conservation team repointing the panels of fine flint flushwork on the exterior face of the north wall of the church.

### Abbey church

Conservation work on the church began in the spring. The repairs have involved repointing the flint work and adding a layer of rough racking on the wall tops using lime putty as we are doing on the Roman walls at Caistor. Vegetation clearance along the north wall has exposed panels of fine flint flushwork all along the north wall which had previously been hardly visible.



Air photo of the abbey church with conservation of the north wall in process. Lines of some of the buried walls are visible in the grass. *Photo by Mike Page.*

### Precinct wall

The team moved on in July to rough racking and repointing the low sections of the precinct wall where they survive around the north side of the site. Both inside and outside faces of this wall were originally built of knapped, squared galletted flint work of the highest quality, underlining what a wealthy abbey this must have been. The original wall seems to have leaned inwards in the boggy ground and then failed. So, it was taken down and the fine quality stone re-used elsewhere. The wall was hastily rebuilt with light-coloured flints using poor quality workmanship with the mortar just squeezed from the joints and left protruding in places. (In the trade these protrusions are delicately known as snots!) It is quite easy to identify the original high quality work because it has a distinctive iron stain quite different from the later build.



The original high quality iron-stained flint work on the precinct wall.





This important photograph of the gatehouse with the windmill in working order and the adjacent precinct wall was taken by T.R. Sedgefield in 1854. The sails could be turned into the wind from the high-level wooden walkway constructed after the removal of the first floor of the gatehouse. The surviving precinct wall was longer then, and there was a doorway at the south end which has since disappeared.

Stephen Heywood, one of Norfolk's specialists in medieval architecture, has studied the wall closely and believes that the original construction can be dated to the time when the abbey received a licence to crenellate in 1327. The erection of the gatehouse then followed in about 1350 and the failure of the wall and its replacement with low-quality work probably followed in about 1380. The short and still largely intact section of the wall near the gatehouse is quite different. It dates to the early sixteenth century and was made of flint pebbles laid partly in herring-bone style, with brick-faced embrasures and crenellations above. A comparison between the picture taken by T.R. Sedgefield in 1854 when the crenellations along the wall top were filled in with one taken by Michael Brandon Jones in the 1970s, shows that they had been re-opened and restored sometime after 1854.



A photo taken by Michael Brandon Jones in the 1970s of the same section of precinct wall, with the crenellations shown blocked in the Sedgefield picture re-opened.

## Involving the community Understanding the landscape

The improvement in the weather this summer came just in time for the beginning of a busy summer of workshops and day schools. In April and May David Robertson, Alison Yardy, Tom Williamson, Paul Warde and Sarah Spooner produced a series of popular days packed with thought-provoking discussions on the making and maintenance of the Broads landscape.

## Graffiti and molehill surveys

Volunteers have continued their monthly surveys of historic graffiti in local churches and molehills on site.

## St Benets in art

During August the project focused on St Benet's Abbey as an inspiration for the creative arts with workshops on drawing and watercolour, a photographic exhibition in Ludham Church and the "CREATE!" event which encouraged around 160 visitors to have a go at creative activities on the site with the help of twenty volunteer stewards.





The butterfly surveying workshop admiring a cloud of meadow browns on the site.

### Wildlife surveys

A series of wildlife survey events, run for us by the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, revealed another aspect of the abbey site. Participants learnt how to identify birds through their songs and calls, and where to look for dragonflies and butterflies. Another workshop introduced participants to the management of hay meadows using a scythe. It is encouraging that most of the participants were keen to participate in regular wildlife surveying at St Benet's, as the data will help the Trust manage the site for biodiversity in the future.



Participants in the dragonfly workshop stalking through the long grass.

### Learning and re-enactment

The Outdoor Learning group completed its task of producing a draft framework for school materials which will be developed over the next few months and made available from the planned new website. As part of this process Salhouse school children re-enacted the riot which took place during the Peasant's Revolt, chanting 'We want justice!' as they marched on the gatehouse. Three brave volunteers dressed as monks quickly surrendered paper scrolls which were safely burnt in a roasting tin. Volunteers have also been leading popular guided tours of the site on Saturdays, Sundays and Wednesday throughout the summer, and will continue throughout September

### Access workshop

A meeting, run in partnership with the Broads Authority, brought together representatives from relevant interest groups, local authorities, landowners, and local businesses to identify opportunities for making the local access network more 'joined-up'.



A trained Visitor Guide leading a group around the abbey site.



This produced a long list of suggestions which the Broads Authority will feed into their Integrated Access Strategy. The information gathered will also be used in our information brochures on how to reach the Abbey by foot, bike and boat

### Working with flint

Other activities included a very successful practical workshop on the use of flint and lime, run by R. & J. Hogg. Participants were offered the rare chance to have a go at flint knapping, pointing up the church walls with lime mortar and producing panels of flint flushwork on specially provided test walls. Once the group got started they didn't want to stop – flint knapping proved particularly addictive!



Participants on the workshop had a try at using flints to create panels of flint flushwork and rough racking on wall tops.



(Above and below) Participants having a go at flint knapping during the workshop run by R & J Hogg at the abbey church on 12th June.



Re-pointing the south wall of the abbey church with Steve Martin, the R. & J. Hogg site foreman, maintaining a watchful eye on the work.





## Heritage Open Days

Over the Heritage Open Days weekend (September 13–15) the 'A Monks Life' event explored the life and times of medieval monks. The Norfolk & Norwich Medieval Association camped on site at the abbey for the whole weekend, demonstrating 14th-century music, illumination, food and stories, while in Ludham village four workshops examined the Benedictine day, diet and sacred music, rounded off with a recital in Ludham Church. The events were well-attended with over 250 visitors venturing out to the Abbey despite the inclement weather, and over 60 people attending the workshops.

## Developing and sustaining site interpretation

Elbow Productions have been appointed to produce the site interpretation scheme, and Penny Wrouth from the company has attended several of the activities to gather material for a film which will form part of the final scheme. The development of the scheme will be a main focus for the next phase of the project, together with the production of school materials, production of an exhibition at the Norfolk Record Office and, most importantly, the establishment of a 'Friends' group to help locally manage the site into the future.



A large gathering in Ludham village hall working in groups contributed to a valuable discussion about how the site should best be presented and explained to visitors.

## Getting involved

If you are interested in taking part in the project or would like to be added to the news and events mailing list, please

- email [info@stbenetsabbey.org](mailto:info@stbenetsabbey.org)
- Tel: 01603 462987
- Go to [www.norfarchtrust.org.uk](http://www.norfarchtrust.org.uk) volunteering page where you will also find the monthly project Blog and Twitter feed.

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