



St Benet's Abbey  
volunteer guide, Barry  
Elliott, filming at St Benet's  
Abbey for Heritage Open  
Days 2020



## Impacts of coronavirus

**2020 will be remembered as the year of the Coronavirus pandemic. The impacts of ongoing restrictions are still unfolding but it is clear that in the heritage sector many small charities are struggling to survive as a result of cancelled fundraising events, closure of sites and resultant loss of revenue. NAT has experienced some knock-on effects from the current situation, but we are pleased to report that these are limited and manageable.**

At the beginning of the lock-down in March we were asked by the police and parish councils to close our car parks at Caistor Roman Town and Burgh Castle Fort to prevent inessential travel. In Burgh Castle this caused some issues with illegal parking around the village, so we were glad to re-open both car parks as soon as restrictions on travel were eased in May.

At the beginning of the year, as part of implementation of the Business Plan, we were planning a number of fund-raising events at our sites, including outdoor theatre and a running event in partnership with local company Positive Steps ([positivestepspt.co.uk](http://positivestepspt.co.uk)). Sadly, these were cancelled, but Positive Steps provided an alternative 'virtual' run and were still able to donate £645 to NAT as a proportion of entry fees. A real run is planned for July next year. In addition, a draft application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for an exciting project at Caistor Roman Town has been put on hold, as the Fund has frozen all new applications while focusing on helping vulnerable heritage



Caistor car park closed during lock-down – thanks to Daniel Skinner at High Ash farm for supplying the tree trunk!

# Impacts of coronavirus

organisations to survive. It is hoped that we will be able return to this proposal next year.

The pause in activities caused by coronavirus has slowed down progress on other aspects of the Business Plan including the proposed sale of Pykerell's House – as Estate Agents ceased working during the lock-down period – and negotiations on potential acquisition of a new site at risk. It is hoped better progress can be reported to members in the next newsletter.

As with other public spaces across the country NAT sites have received an increased number of visitors seeking exercise and the opportunity to meet friends and relatives in relatively safe outdoor environments. At Burgh Castle Fort in particular this has caused some issues with large unofficial gatherings in the evenings, with consequent increases in litter and other anti-social behaviours. Our caretaker at the fort has been kept very busy with daily clear-ups, for which we are very grateful. The police are aware of the issues.

*“A positive outcome of increased visitor numbers has been an uplift in donations at Caistor Roman Town and Burgh Castle Fort and through our website.”*

A positive outcome of increased visitor numbers has been an uplift in donations at Caistor Roman Town and Burgh Castle Fort and through our website. Feedback has confirmed that this is a result of an increased appreciation by our visitors of the public access we provide to historic landscapes rich in archaeological interest and wildlife. Another factor is the new branded signs at all of our sites which have raised NAT's profile and helped visitors to better understand our work.



Visitors at Caistor during lock-down



Natalie Butler, new Volunteer Co-ordinator

## Volunteer activities

In response to coronavirus restrictions on gatherings, we had to cancel all our planned school visits and guided tours this season, which was very disappointing for our volunteers, and for the groups who were expecting to visit. Despite this, our new volunteer co-ordinator, Natalie Butler, has been working with volunteers behind the scenes to make sure we are ready to start activities again as soon as it's safe.

Natalie, who was appointed in April, has an MA in Landscape History from UEA, and has worked as a Volunteer Co-ordinator at National Trust property, Paycocke's House, and as a freelance historian and consultant in Norfolk.

Since starting work with us she has instigated regular newsletters and zoom gatherings to keep in touch with volunteers and has produced a review and plan for future volunteer activity. In preparation for the very much adapted national Heritage Open Days events in September she helped volunteers organise some innovative content for our website to enable people who can't visit our sites to find out more about them online – including a poetry recital by Kevin Crossley-Holland, evocative soundscapes and a series of 'Hidden Stories' mini-videos made by our guides (see front page image). These will shortly be available from our website.

# Burgh Castle Fort Almanac

Members will be aware that since 2018 the Burgh Castle Almanac project, led by the Restoration Trust, has been supporting people who experience mental illness through a creative approach to exploring the history and landscape of the Roman Fort.

The project was due to end in May of this year but due to the restrictions on group meetings, some of the planned activities - including the final exhibition and production of an Almanac - had to be postponed. The project partners are currently working with the Broads Authority to develop an extra phase of the project, to enable these outcomes to be achieved in the forthcoming months.

In response to the lock-down the Restoration Trust (RT) moved their sessions online where they met regularly with artist Ian Brownlie. Participants were sent out art parcels, and then shared images of their art work within the Almanac's facebook group. As a great exemplar of what can be done to support projects online, Burgh Castle Almanac featured in two blogs produced by the National Lottery Heritage Fund for Mental Health Awareness Week in mid-May, one an interview with RT's director Laura Drysdale, and another with John Durrant who blogs at Living With Mental Health. Laura has been nominated for a National Lottery Award for her work to keep the charity's services running during the pandemic. The project will also feature as a case study in The Heritage Alliance's forthcoming report on Heritage and Health.

Burgh Castle Almanac is a partnership between the Restoration Trust, Norfolk Archaeological Trust, Access Community



*Pin-hole camera used to produce an image of the Burgh Castle Almanac group (before COVID-19). Credit Jeremy Webb*



Trust and Norfolk Museums Service. It is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund through the Broads Authority's Water Mills and Marshes Landscape Partnership.

More information about the project at [burghcastlealmanac.org](http://burghcastlealmanac.org)

[www.heritagefund.org.uk/stories/feeling-belonging-heritage-and-mental-health](http://www.heritagefund.org.uk/stories/feeling-belonging-heritage-and-mental-health)

[www.heritagefund.org.uk/stories/how-heritage-helped-john-reconnect-world](http://www.heritagefund.org.uk/stories/how-heritage-helped-john-reconnect-world)



## TFoSBA

We are sad to report that The Friends of St Benet's Abbey have taken the decision to wind up their organisation. After a fantastic year in 2019 when they successfully led a major lottery-funded project to celebrate the 1000th year since the Abbey's foundation, they had found it difficult to find new committee members to continue their activities. NAT is very grateful for the support TFoSBA has provided over the last six years.

The good news is that the TFoSBA volunteers who lead guided tours and wildlife surveys have agreed to carry on volunteering for NAT and will now be supported by Natalie.



*Wildlife survey at St Benet's Abbey. Credit Jane Bowden*

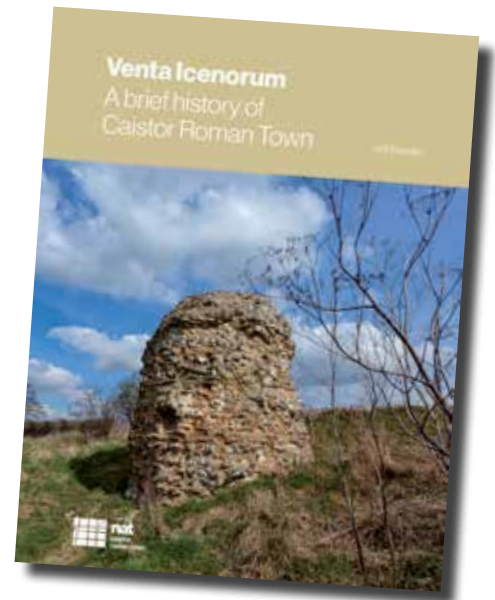
# New guide book for Caistor Roman Town

**Following the publication of our updated guide for St Benet's Abbey last year, it's a pleasure to report that in July we published a new guide for Caistor Roman Town.**

Wider understanding of Roman Britain has fundamentally changed since the publication of the original Caistor guidebook in 1991. The new guide has been written by Will Bowden, Professor in Roman Archaeology at the University of Nottingham, who has led archaeological research at the Town since 2006. New findings during this period include the dating of the street grid, the discovery of an early timber forum, the dating of the major early defensive earthwork, the identification of cemeteries and the first analysis of the human population of the town, as well as the identification of major phases of Anglo-Saxon settlement to the west of the town. We also know much more about the diet, dress, and religious practices of the people who lived there.

To buy a copy online please order through our website as the distributor will pay NAT a higher percentage on sales from our link – the link can be found on the Caistor Roman Town webpage. Also available at Norwich City Books.

*Publication of the guidebook was made possible through grants from the University of Nottingham, Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society and a legacy from the estate of Sophia Hankinson.*



South rampart, Caistor Roman Town  
(Nick Stone)

# Change of chair

**In March Peter Griffiths stood down as chairman due to family illness. Peter, who became a committee member in 2011 before being appointed chairman in 2013, guided NAT through some significant projects during his chairmanship, including the St Benet's Abbey Conservation, Access & Community project and, more recently, Onwards & Upwards.**

His previous career with the National Trust which included responsibility for nationally and internationally important sites such as Sutton Hoo, Wicken Fen and Blakeney Point, meant that he brought enormous experience and wisdom to the role, during a time when NAT needed to develop a new strategy for ensuring a sustainable future for our work. We are very grateful to him for his commitment and support over the past nine years.



Previous chairman, Matthew Martin kindly stepped in as acting chair, prior to Jonathan Sisson taking on the role in July. Jonathan is a Chartered Accountant who has practised in Norwich, London and in the Far East, and was for many years a partner at Price Waterhouse Coopers, a multinational professional services company. More recently, from 2006 to 2016 he served as Honorary Treasurer and a Council member of the University of East Anglia. Jonathan has also been President of the Norfolk and Waveney Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Chairman of Octagon Plc, the PFI company which owns the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital. His background in business and finance will be invaluable at a time when NAT is taking forward its first business plan.

## Shared administrator post with NNAS

As members will know, NAT and the Norfolk & Norwich Archaeological Society share similar aspirations for protecting and promoting Norfolk's archaeology and have worked side-by-side since NAT was founded in 1923 (NNAS was founded in 1846).

In this context, the two charities have agreed to joint-fund a part-time administrator post to support the work of both, and strengthen our joint-role as champions of Norfolk's archaeology.

The two-day post was advertised in September and it is hoped the appointment will be made in October.

## Goodbye to Maureen

An incentive for taking forward the new administrator role was the request by our Company and Membership secretary, Maureen Kimbley, to stand down.

Maureen will be known to members as the person who welcomed you to NAT and then chased you for your annual subscription in the nicest possible way.

October's council meeting will be the last she administers after eight years. We are very grateful to her for the smooth running of our back office over this period.





*Excavation of the diagonal road in the NE corner of the town (Will Bowden)*

## Keeping in touch

We are always pleased to hear from members about any aspect of the Trust's work, especially if you are interested in volunteering at one of our sites!

Email us at [info@norfarchtrust.org.uk](mailto:info@norfarchtrust.org.uk)

You can also follow us on Twitter @NorfArchTrust and facebook (Norfolk Archaeological Trust) and we regularly update the website news and events pages [www.norfarchtrust.org.uk](http://www.norfarchtrust.org.uk).

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