

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

SPRING NEWSLETTER

2016

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Fig 1: Part of the precinct walls revealed on the eastern boundary of Burnham Norton Friary during clearance of vegetation.

In this Spring Newsletter we highlight the progress of projects at Burnham Norton Friary and Burgh Castle Roman Fort, the latest on interpretation at Caistor Roman Town; volunteer conservation work at a number of our sites; and development of the Strategic Plan 2016 – 2021.

Burnham Norton

Work has commenced at St Mary's Friary on the repair of the precinct walls which run along the north and east boundaries of the site.

The first step was to clear away the extensive bramble growth which completely concealed the eastern section of the wall, and made access difficult to the northern section. Local contractor Rory Hart cleared a path through the main area of undergrowth, revealing extensive lengths of surviving medieval wall.

The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) group then carried out careful work to remove brambles and other undergrowth adjacent to the walls.

NPS Archaeology is currently engaged in surveying and recording the condition of the walls prior to their conservation. The full report will be available later in the year but Andrew Crowson, project manager, has provided us with a summary of findings so far:



Fig 2: A section of the precinct walls at Burnham Norton before clearance of vegetation.



Fig 3: The wall along the northern boundary.



Fig 4: East wall exterior with mixed stones repair. Photo: NPS

One notable discovery by the current survey is of the likelihood of paired entrances set opposite in the east and west walls, which may indicate the approximate cardinal orientation of the site and a line of thoroughfare respecting the friary church. The imposing gatehouse and ancillary gate by the road in the west wall are perfectly evident, but evidence gleaned from the wall analysis indicates that these openings were matched in the east wall, which until recently was engulfed by vegetation. Although the masonry remains in the east wall are too fragmentary to preserve any gate furniture, the evidence for one is strong and for the other circumstantial, but persuasive.’ Andy Crowson NPS Archaeology Projects Manager

David Watt of Hutton & Rostron is currently drawing up the specification for repairs of the walls, and work should start on site in the summer. These works are funded through Natural England under the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement for the site.

‘The scale of the precinct at Burnham is certainly impressive in ambition, but it seems from the modest number and the scale of internal structures that early aspirations may not have been realised. The fabric and construction of the walls is also, perhaps, telling in this interpretation. Where the north wall is collapsed, it can be seen that the narrow (650mm) wall was built straight off the ground, rather than within a foundation trench. These aspects would seem to preclude a construction of significant height; the greatest height measured by the survey is 2.15m in a fallen section. The perimeter walls at Castle Acre stand more than a metre taller than this, and up to 1 metre thick.

The original elements of the extant walls are characteristically alike, and indicate a single phase of initial construction. The walls were constructed almost exclusively from rough flint, in wavering courses and distinct lifts. Galleting with shards of flint for levelling is evident between lift lines. The (probably varied) sources of the raw materials used in the walls suggests that their construction was very much a local enterprise. The frost-affected characteristics of much of the flint suggest that it was quarried or collected from outcrops of gravels in the adjacent river Burn valley; potential quarry sources for other distinguishable flint can also be found nearby.



Fig 5: Volunteers from TCV clearing vegetation from the wall.



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



The European Agricultural
Fund for Rural Development
Europe investing in rural areas



This project has been funded through Environmental Stewardship

Burgh Castle

Burgh Castle Fort: Life outside the walls

Encouraged by the support of the local Parish and Parochial Church Councils and local volunteers the Trust is currently developing a project to learn more about the settlement that grew up outside the Roman fort walls. If successful, this will include geophysical survey, and a programme of archaeological test-pits in the village outside the scheduled monument area, to help us understand more about the size and spread of the Roman settlement. More news on this will be made available in the Trust's monthly bulletins and on the website.

Burgh Castle Almanac

The Broads Landscape Partnership has been successful with its first round application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for its proposed Water, Mills and Marshes scheme. The HLF has awarded a grant of £2.6 million for the development and delivery of the scheme. The first round grant of £226k will allow the partnership to fully develop project ideas before a second round application to unlock the remaining £2.4 million grant in 2017.

The Trust's proposed project, the Burgh Castle Almanac, is included in this scheme. Working with our partners, The Restoration Trust, Stonham Home Group and Time & Tide Museum, this project aims to provide education, skills, health and wellbeing benefits for people in recovery and being supported to live independently. The project will provide a framework of regular training and creative activities at the site which will include monthly trips to make a photographic record of the fort. As part of the development phase, training day 'tasters' will take place in May and June this year.

For information on the work of The Restoration Trust see: www.restorationtrust.org.uk



Fig 6: Burgh Castle.

Caistor

Making Connections Project

As part of the new interpretation scheme being developed for the site, the Making Connections project, funded by Historic England, is producing learning materials for schools and a new exhibition at the Castle Museum. The purpose of this three-pronged approach is to provide integrated information about the site, and continuity in the use of graphics.

Over the winter months work has been progressing on refreshing the permanent exhibition focused on the Roman Town at the Castle Museum. The Historic England grant has provided the opportunity for updating seven of the interpretation panels and two of the display cases in the existing exhibition, to reflect recent research. Visitors will also be able to view video 'fly-throughs' of the new digital reconstruction of the town. The new exhibition will be open in late spring.



Fig 7: Students on the SISJAC tour enjoying the Augmented Reality feature at Caistor Roman Town

In February a group of students from Japan, the EU and UK visited the Roman Town as part of a course being developed by the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures (SISJAC), focused on presenting British Archaeology and Heritage to an international audience. Dr Will Bowden led a guided tour of the site, and the new interpretation panels proved to be a useful resource. The group was particularly interested in the Augmented Reality feature of the new scheme.



Fig 8: New interpretation panel at Caistor Roman Town. (Sue Walker White)



Fig 9: The eastern bank of the town before scrub clearance.



Fig 10: The eastern bank of the town after scrub clearance.

Scrub Clearance at Caistor Roman Town

Easton College students have provided two days of felling, coppicing and strimming at the site as part of their practical studies, for no charge. This was the start of a rolling annual programme of management which will be provided by the students, to create a mosaic of habitats, and to reduce shelter for burrowing animals on the east bank. The clearance of scrub has enhanced presentation of this part of the monument, making the scale of the bank and ditch much easier to appreciate.

St Benet's Abbey

Bure Valley Conservation Group

This group has recently formed as part of the Norfolk Wildlife Trust's Bure Valley Living Landscapes project. During two visits in February and April a group of over 20 volunteers cleared undergrowth from the precinct walls, and from around the young hedging which was planted in 2014 to deter cattle from walking over the walls to reach the outer ditch.



Fig 11: BVGC volunteers at St Benet's Abbey. To the left can be seen a section of the precinct wall protected by hessian and corrugated sheeting over winter, following last year's repairs.

The Friends of St Benet's Abbey (TFoSBA)

TFoSBA held a successful second AGM in October and are currently planning activities and events for the coming season. Free Guided Tours of the Abbey site will be available from Sunday 1st May until the end of September, each Wednesday at 2:00pm, and each Saturday and Sunday at 3:00pm.

Following the success of last year's trip to the Bishop's service at the Abbey, the group has booked the Southern Comfort paddle boat again for this year's service on Sunday August 7th. For more information contact tfosba@gmail.com

St Benet's Abbey Conference

The Trust, The Norfolk Archaeological & Historical Research Group (NAHRG) and the Centre of East Anglian Studies (CEAS) have joined together to organise a one-day conference for our members on recent research at St Benet's Abbey, to be held on Saturday 9 July 2016.

The conference will provide the opportunity to hear about research undertaken as part of the Heritage Lottery-funded Conservation Access & Community project 2012-2014, as well as more recent findings. Speakers will include Dr David Bescoby (Honorary Lecturer, School of Environmental Sciences UEA), on his geophysical survey of part of the site; and Dr Julian Luxford (Reader in the School of Art History, University of St Andrews) who recently published a new analysis of the Abbey gatehouse. Further details will be made available to members soon.



Fig 12: New interpretation at St Benet's Abbey (Sue Walker White)



Fig 13: clearing scrub at Middleton Mount.

Middleton Mount

Following the Gaywood Valley Conservation Group's (GVCG) successful visit to carry out maintenance of the steps at Middleton Mount in the spring, the group returned in December to scrape out the pond and plant some wildflower plugs on the margins, and to carry out some scrub clearance. It's amazing how much work can be done in three hours by a group of twenty enthusiastic people!



Fig 14: Middleton Mount pond after cleaning.

Strategic Plan 2016 - 2021

A final draft of the Strategic Plan was submitted to Council in January and will be adopted at the April Council Meeting. In line with the Trust's stated objects to promote and foster the discovery, excavation, preservation, recording and study of sites and objects of archaeological and/or historical importance within the County of Norfolk for the public benefit, the Plan sets out three main aims:

- To conserve archaeological sites in Norfolk
- To facilitate opportunities for community and volunteer engagement
- To encourage and promote interest in the conservation of Norfolk's sites and objects of archaeological and historical importance

The Strategic Plan will be made available on the Trust website once adopted.

Keeping in touch

We will always be 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!

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You can also follow us on Twitter @NorfArchTrust and we regularly update the news page of the website www.norfarchtrust.org.uk.