



# CAISTOR ROMAN PROJECT



Annual Report 2020-21



## Chairman's Statement—Alan Pask

Despite all the difficulties of the last year or so, caused by the covid pandemic and lockdowns, I believe I can report another year of progress for CRP! We have achieved a number of positive developments in our research and administration, despite the frustrations of few face-to-face meetings and limitations on practical work especially the digging programme.

I believe the teamwork in CRP has been outstanding in the last year, as shown in the following reports. We have used the lockdowns to undertake a number of research surveys together with much desktop research and improvements in our administration – and even managed one of the very few digs to take place in covid secure conditions. Mike Pinner and his team deserve much praise for 'getting on' with the job at Caistor Hall Hotel last summer, providing an excellent basis for further work at such a key site. The excavations at the Temple site had to be postponed however, owing to the covid situation, and we look forward to a return there in August 2021.

The lockdowns gave good opportunities to deal with the backlog of reporting on previous excavations – we could do with more members getting involved in this essential activity.

A significant grant from the National Lottery Emergency Fund enabled us to revise and improve the CRP website – now much more informative and accessible – and to purchase a drone. An update to the CRP operations manual was agreed, and at the barn the backlog of processing was completed, as well as finds from the summer 2020 dig.

Much work was also undertaken to improve our approach to community outreach by planning to involve a wider range of people from all walks of life and abilities. We hope this will come to fruition in 2021 particularly our links to Operation Nightingale (assisting injured ex-service personnel) and a new link to the Restoration Trust.

Our membership figures remained around 100 renewals for 2021 – which is remarkable support during the pandemic restrictions. Thank you all.

As we moved into 2021, our Winter Series of talks proved very popular, regularly attracting 45/50 members tuning in to zoom, to hear mainly other members talking impressively about their specialisms. Undoubtedly an enjoyable and educational series. Many thanks to all those who presented – I know a lot of time and energy went into all the presentations.

The problem of the new lease at the barn also emerged early in the new year. The increased rent raises several challenges for CRP. The trustees have tackled these with energy and members have contributed some useful ideas. We resolved to stay at the barn, review the contents and fund-raise over the next couple of years. We are confident the finances are sound if we follow this route. More on that issue over the coming months.

We have continued to enjoy the support of many people and organisations during 2020 and we are grateful for that support. We especially value the support and encouragement we receive from Antony Jarrold, our patron, throughout the year.

And finally, we all owe huge thanks to the trustees who put in so many hours to ensure CRP runs well and continues to succeed!

We look forward to another active and successful year in 2021!



*Left: Fieldwork with a difference at the Caistor Hall Hotel in 2020 (Ian Jackson) . Right: What we have all missed about archaeology this year (Jenny Press)*

## Research in 2020—Mike Pinner, Research Coordinator

They say that every obstacle represents an opportunity- and what we've lacked in face- to- face work has been partly replaced by research and a reassessment of where we are with our current projects. A backlog of reporting from our early test pitting has been completed and major strides made in completion of more complex reporting on recent excavation. Much of this work has fallen to far too few people and restrictions made it impossible to expand the group of report writers as we would have wished. It remains vital that more members become involved in the future.

Members will already be aware of work done at the hotel and on Friston Field. Both areas are offering tempting targets for future research as is our understanding of the temple complex and its importance in the 'Caistor story'. Members will also have heard that future work will target our understanding of what came before and after the Roman town. We hope to continue our excellent relationship with the new owner of the hotel in understanding past work there, particularly the 'mausoleum' and F. R.. Mann's excavations.

We have kept in regular contact with the Skinners at High Ash Farm who have confirmed that we shall be welcome to undertake our postponed excavations on Temple Field. This will take place in the last two weeks of August- restrictions allowing- so please watch out for further briefings and information as the plot develops!



*A very fine Cu alloy horse pendant recovered in a recent metal detector survey of Old Hall.*

### Membership and finance - Andrew Ray , Treasurer

Our membership currently stands at 105 including 8 students. It is encouraging as this number has climbed since April 2017 when we had only 70 members.

It is also encouraging that the only non-renewals we have experienced are students who have moved away from Norfolk as they complete their degrees. However it remains to be seen whether the planned increase in fees this year leads to a fall in numbers. We are grateful to a number of members who give a donation on top of their membership.

Our major Heritage Lottery Fund (now called the National Lottery Heritage Fund) project came to an end in 2019 and the final instalment of that grant was received in January 2020. Little did we know then that we would be back in their arms again with an application for a further £8900 to the Culture Recovery Fund for Heritage to help us mitigate the effects of Covid-19. This funding was used to update our website to improve our online presence and for PPE enabling a socially distanced dig at Caistor Hall Hotel. It also secured other items to help with our work in a socially distanced fashion: loud hailers for tours, a Zoom subscription for meetings that has been heavily used and last of all a drone and camera for aerial surveys.

Other very useful funding has come from the Paul Bassham Charitable Trust, the Laura Elizabeth Stuart Memorial Trust, both local charities and of course our members who contributed £2440 and NNAS who paid us £1000 again.

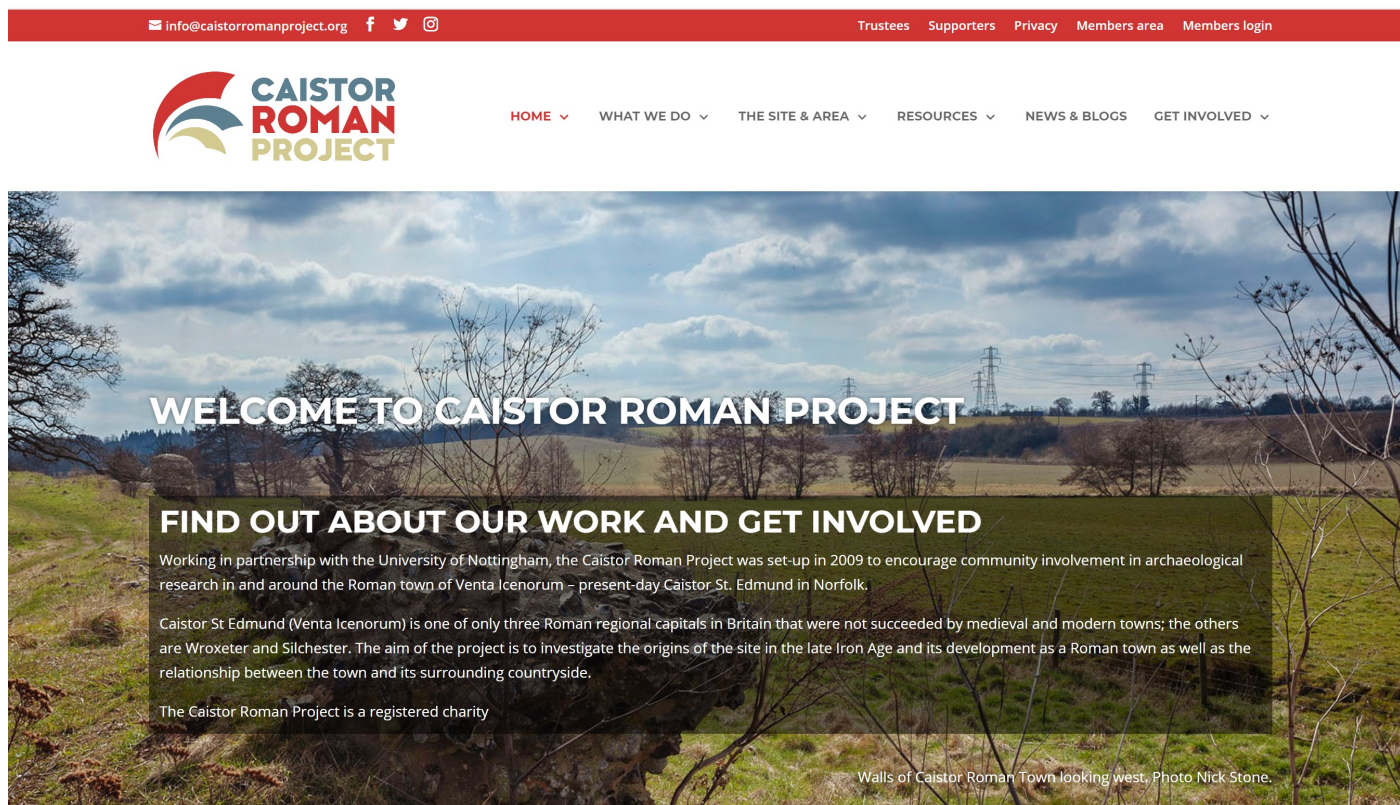
Looking forward we are well equipped to cope with digging under Covid-19 conditions but we face a daunting task in raising enough funds to cover our cost of running the barn which looks set to triple. Just to give an idea a two-week dig could cost up to £15000 and our annual fixed costs are about £5000 and set to rise steeply.



## New-look website for CRP—Andy Woodman

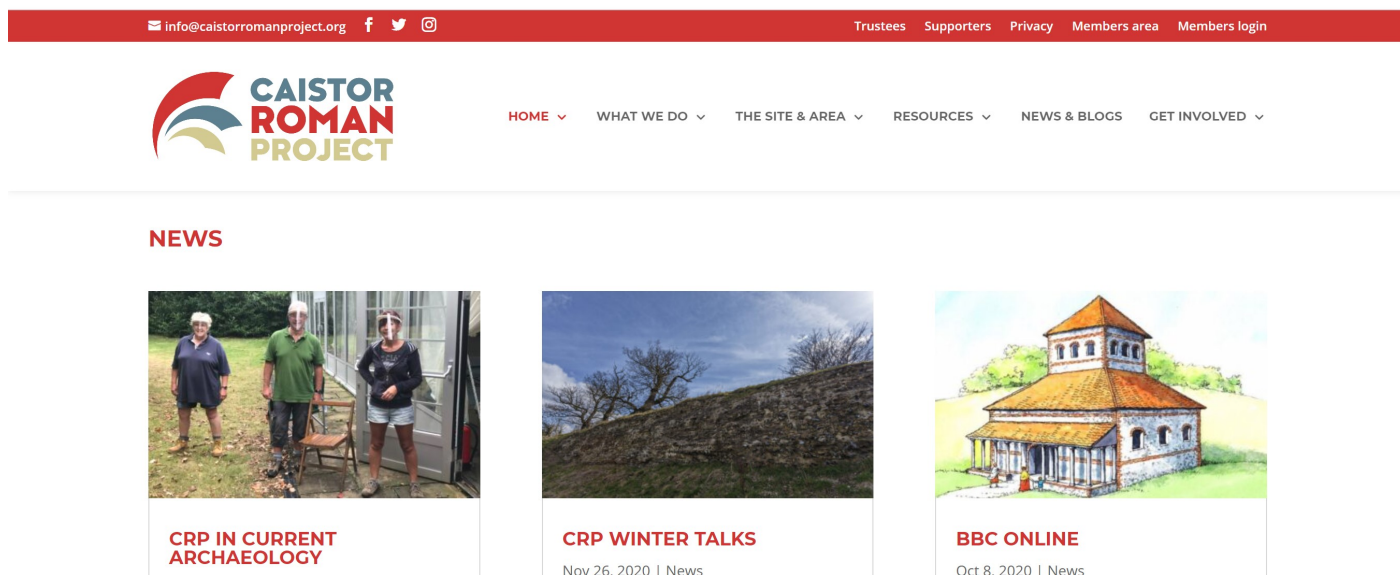
In 2020 CRP was successful in bidding for a grant from the National Lottery Emergency Fund given the challenges to our work within Covid19 restrictions. The bulk of this grant was directed to fund the redevelopment of our website. After a 3 month development period with Starfish, our Norwich based web development partners, we were delighted in November to announce that the new CRP Logo and Website was live. This replaced the previous site and can be accessed via the same address <http://caistorromanproject.org>

The site was designed to better reflect CRP as a community archaeology group for both members and the general public alike and to become a digital repository for our published work, research materials and active projects.



We have begun to load all CRP publications, from excavation reports and research papers to our annual reports, into the Resources section and will continue this as documents become available. Documents for active projects are being stored by each project within the Members Area which is restricted to CRP members only.

We are also loading video recordings of the CRP winter talks schedule that we held via Zoom in early 2021. The website is not intended to replace the Clarion newsletters but will include some of the news items from Clarion. We will also look to keep the website aligned to the CRP presence on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter all of which can be linked to from the website.





## CRP Drone

As we were able to develop the website inside our initial National Lottery Emergency Fund budget, we were also able to fund the purchase of a CRP drone plus training with support from locally based Drone Training Ltd.

The drone training has been on hold due to Covid19 restrictions, but we are looking forward to extending the quality of our excavation photography and research work using the drone as soon as we can.

We also managed to fund a “GoPro” camera for those all-important dig diaries – bring on “Digging For Britain”!!



## CRP Barn & Post-Excavation Work—Andy Woodman

It was a tale of two lockdowns in the barn in 2020. Early in the year, before Covid19 struck, we opened the barn as normal and were able to complete the processing of the backlogs (subject to marking) from all previous projects.

The Spring lockdown then caused the barn to close for 3 months but fortunately we were able to re-open in time to prepare for the summer 2020 excavation behind the Caistor Hall Hotel and to then bring back and process the finds from that dig.

With a huge effort (with up to 20 members on some mornings) the barn team were able to complete the basic post-excavation processing work from the Summer dig before the next lockdown forced us to close again and mothball for the winter.

All 2020 bulk finds processing in the barn was completed by that point and good progress was made on the cataloguing and reporting work.



*Covid –secure working at the barn. How to do all aspects of archaeology in socially distanced conditions at the barn was just one of the things we learned in the challenging environment of 2020.*

In Spring 2021 we renewed our lease for the barn for 3 years, albeit at a significantly higher rent, and during this time we will carry out a project to review the barn contents and our future plans for storage and post-excavation work.

We look forward to welcoming everyone back to the barn as soon as we are legally able to do so – we miss you all!

## CRP Operating Manual—Andy Woodman

The closure of the Barn and lack of an Easter dig and follow up work gave us the opportunity to thoroughly revisit and document our operating processes, roles and responsibilities and standard documents - from initial research and planning through excavation and post-excavation processes to final reporting. The Manual was approved by the Trustees in the summer and has since been uploaded onto the CRP Website. It will continue to be updated as our methods and standards continue to evolve and improve.



## Community liaison—Caroline Lowton

Community links are at the heart of Caistor Roman Project and never more have we needed to think about how we at Caistor connect with external groups of people disadvantaged in one way or another, individuals who could gain so much from being able to access our wonderful town and engage in some of the mysteries and excitements of archaeology that we, the members, are fortunate enough to enjoy.

The plan to work with a team of Operation Nightingale veterans has been simmering away for some time now, but we are really hopeful that we can at last host some of the veterans at this year's summer dig. Many congratulations must go to Richard Osgood who was awarded an MBE in the New Year's Honours list in recognition of his outstanding work with Operation Nightingale and also his work with the MOD's DIO. You may not be aware just how far-ranging Richard's interests are: he is also a talented artist and has recently turned his artistic skills to book illustration. It is exciting to see his chapter heading drawings in Dr Cat Jarman's book *River Kings: A New History of Vikings from Scandinavia to the Silk Roads* and I do urge you to read this fascinating book which traces the journey of a carnelian bead found in a Viking excavation in Derbyshire back to its origins in 8<sup>th</sup> century Baghdad and Gujerat.

The promotion of mental health and wellbeing is now very much part of the current funding landscape, and we are currently developing a partnership with Restoration Trust. This charity has a well-recognised background of working in the area of mental health, inclusion and diversity and has recently completed the successful Burgh Castle Almanac project, an archaeology, creativity and wellbeing programme, which has culminated in an uplifting film 'The Return of the Happy Times', the title for which was taken from the legend on a Roman coin. Supported by NAT and in collaboration with Restoration Trust, we are now trialling a pilot scheme of four sessions to take place towards the end of 2021; if all goes well, this may well lead to a larger project in the future. It is proposed that each session will look at an aspect of the town's history through the lens of archaeology, art, music or photography, and covering a range of topics. This is a great opportunity to engage with a group of participants who would not normally be able to access the huge benefits that an archaeological site such as Caistor Roman town can offer, and the CRP trustees are very hopeful that some of our members will be prepared to share their now specialist knowledge to enable this group to flourish beyond the initial pilot scheme.

*The challenges of Covid-secure digging, as depicted by Jenny Press*





## The Tas Valley Landscape Project– Wendy Bylett

During past months, contacts with landowners have been made and where Coronavirus restrictions have allowed, surveys have been completed. These entailed metal detecting and collection of pottery scatters and worked flints. Our intention was not to sterilise sites by removing all archaeological material from the soil, but to recover representative samples of materials so the date and nature of human activity can be securely characterised, and its significance and research potential assessed. Although fieldwork has been 'stop start', finds research and reports have been written, and socially-distanced contact with landowners has also been maintained, ensuring access to land is approved to enable fieldwork to be resumed as soon as practicable, and restrictions are lifted. We will continue with level one surveys where required and possibly level two surveys which will involve metal detecting and field walking. An historical and archaeological approach is helping us validate the oral and written histories and to chart changing land use and organisation, developing a wider understanding of the relationship between Caistor Roman town and the surrounding rural landscape.

### Publicity – Val Cossey

Despite the lack of excavation activity last year, we obtained some valuable publicity from a variety of sources. By far the biggest generator of interest was the BBC Online article on the temple. Below is the complete list for the year.

EDP 4 August 2020 – letter in EDP re bringing history to light (Val)

August 2020 – letter in Current Archaeology outlining CRP's response to lockdown and keeping in touch with members (Val)

We were approached by BBC Online after the 2019 temple dig and asked for a piece for their website. This article went live on 14 September 2020, at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-norfolk-54031373> and generated further publicity. Below is the list of coverage:

- BBC Online 14 September 2020
- The Times, Monday 14 September 2020
- Eastern Daily Press, Monday 14 September 2020
- Times Radio, Will Bowden interviewed by Mariella Frostrup, 14/9/20, 15.15 p.m.
- BB Radio Norfolk, interview with Will Bowden for Drivetime slot, 14/9/20
- Talk Sport, interview with Will Bowden broadcast early morning 15/9/20

Other significant items in archaeology publications:

- Journal of Community Archaeology and Heritage – paper by Will ([online](#)) September 2020
- British Archaeology Nov/Dec 2020 – 'To dig or not to dig: who decides?' (Will) – condensed version of JCAH article above
- Autumn 2020 Association for Roman Archaeology ARA News – 'New discoveries at the extra-mural temple at *Venta Icenorum*' by Will Bowden, Giles Emery, Ian Jackson, Rhiane Keeley and Mike Pinner
- March 2021 Current Archaeology – short report and photo on our covid-restricted dig in August 2020 (Val)

## Roman Caistor: 'One of largest' Roman Britain temples revealed in Norfolk

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*Jenny Press's reconstruction of the temple received worldwide attention thanks to BBC coverage*



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NEWS

### Caistor Roman Project gets a boost

February 1, 2021 · 3 mins read



*Reports of our National Lottery Heritage fund support and Covid-secure dig in Current Archaeology*



## Publication success for Nat Harlow

May 2021 saw the publication of Dr Natasha Harlow's *Belonging and Belongings: Portable artefacts and identity in the civitas of the Iceni* in the British Archaeological Reports Archaeology of Roman Britain Series. Nat is well-known to her fellow CRP members as a veteran of excavations and field-walking. But those who see her in a muddy hole may not know that she successfully gained a highly competitive fully funded AHRC Midlands3Cities PhD scholarship at the University of Nottingham, supervised by Will Bowden and Professor Colin Haselgrove of the University of Leicester, graduating in 2018.

The book presents Nat's PhD research which tests the archaeological evidence for the Iceni as a group, through analysis of the region's distinctive material culture, particularly highlighting the impact of metal-detector finds on the available dataset for research. It evaluates the theory that the Iceni were slow to adopt Roman imports and luxury goods, either as a form of deliberate resistance or due to cultural conservatism following the failed revolt.

The book has already met a very positive reception from the academic community. Professor Martin Millett of the University of Cambridge said of the book, 'This is new material, uniquely looking at PAS data in the context of other finds from an area where metal-detecting is very long-established. It is high quality and a very helpful and detailed analysis.' Professor Ellen Swift of the University of Kent, said "The book makes a useful contribution to our understanding of several topics such as the Iron Age to Roman transition period, and the nature of the study area in the early Roman period, and successfully questions previous interpretations that are still very much led by the historical narrative.'

Like most academic books it's a bit on the pricey side at £63 but is a great example of where involvement with CRP (plus an enormous amount of hard work) can take you.



*In case Dr Nat lets publication glory go to her head, here she is being made to undergo compulsory mattocking therapy!*



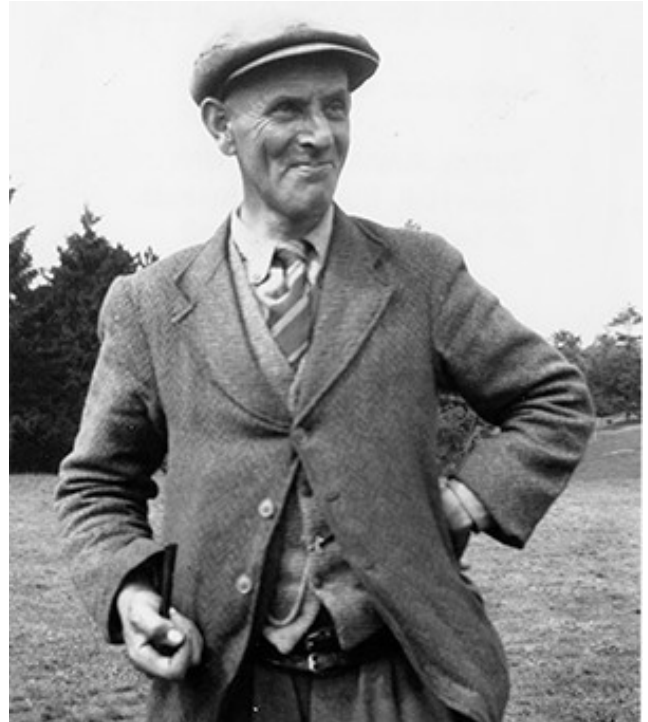
## Some thoughts on the Netflix film, 'The Dig' - Vicky Hawkes

'The Dig' was released on 29 January 2021 – and didn't we all need something like this to look forward to, through the dark days of the January lockdown? There is an interesting review by Sue Brunning on the British Museum [blog](#) where she compares some of the original photographs with scenes from the film. The Sutton Hoo treasures were gifted by Edith Pretty, the landowner and are stored at the British Museum, along with archaeological drawings, film footage, photographs, letters and diaries, forming a first-hand account of the discovery. Sue Brunning was impressed not only by the level of research carried out by members of the film production team, who visited the Museum to examine the array of materials in the archives, but also by their attention to detail in recreating the impression of the burial ship. Ralph Fiennes (Basil Brown in the film) also researched at the Museum and more importantly gained practical hands on experience by joining a local Suffolk archaeological group dig for a day. As a teenager, the person running the dig had known Basil Brown well and had helped him on several digs so was ideally placed to provide first hand commentary to Ralph. Lynda Bradley has her own story to tell about this, as she was present that day and lent Ralph her chair. After all, who would think to bring your own chair with you? All of this was pre-Covid, of course!

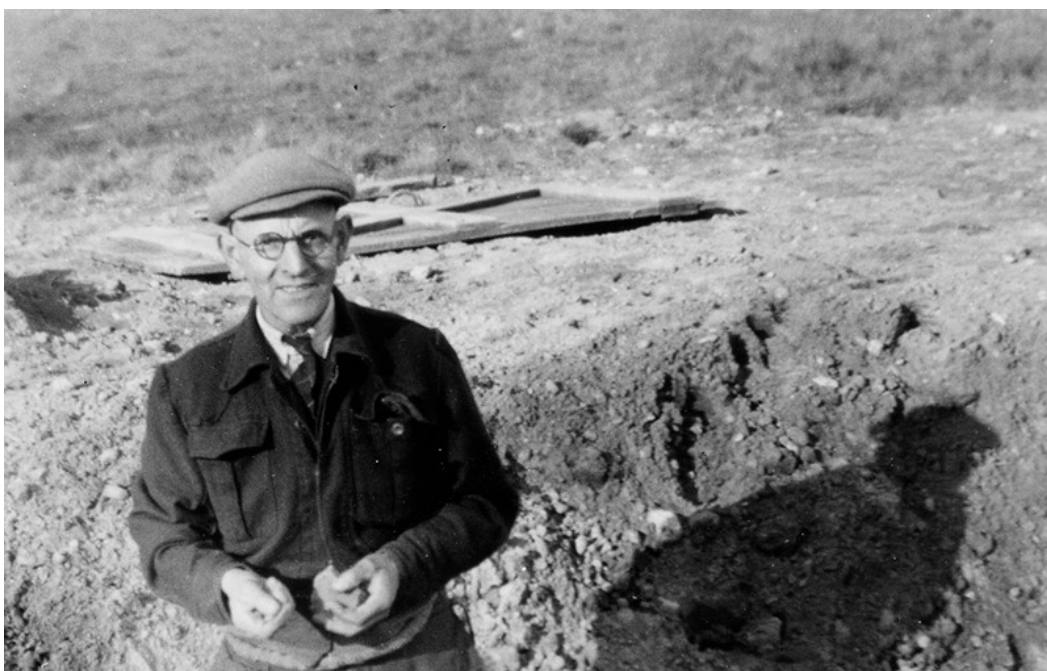
I enjoyed the film immensely and it has fired my desire to find out more about Basil, that rather quirky person I met when I was young, and to visit the revamped Visitor Centre at Sutton Hoo. I loved the scenery, which spoke to me of the beauty of rural Suffolk, even though I understand it was not all filmed in East Anglia. I can forgive the characterisation of Edith Pretty as a fragile and slightly mysterious widow and the contrived love element that ran through the narrative and padded out the story. However, there were a couple of things that jarred horribly. Firstly, I am sorry but Basil lived his adult life in Rickingham (Suffolk), so why show Diss Post Office (Norfolk), intimating that this was where he lived? Quite an important point to someone who was born and spent her early years in Rickingham, two doors down from where Basil lived. Secondly, as my sister pointed out, it is 30 miles from Rickingham to

Sutton Hoo, and although we know that Basil used to cycle there – I remember my parents telling me this - it is a big stretch of the imagination to suggest that the young Robert Pretty would have made the journey alone on his bike, even if he happened to know the route.

But these things aside for me there is a magic in the story - the same magic that came through in John Preston's book 'The Dig' on which the film was based - that of a local, dedicated, unassuming, self-taught archaeologist who was instrumental in unearthing the most impressive medieval grave to be discovered in Europe. Thankfully the film is helping Basil gain the recognition he rightfully deserves.



*Basil Brown (Suffolk Record Office)*



*Basil Brown excavating at West Stow (Suffolk Record Office). These and other images can be found in Sarah Doig's fascinating series of blogs exploring the life and work of Basili Brown (<https://heritage-suffolk.wordpress.com/2021/01/08/basil-brown-archaeologist/>)*



## CRP Outreach -not what it says on the tin! - Alex Atherton

Early 2020 saw a flurry of outreach work! We developed a new on-site activity for our schools programme and Newton Flotman Primary School came to the town, followed up by a visit to the school on consecutive weeks in early March, and further school visits had been booked. However, early casualties of the first lockdown were our training days for schools and tour guide volunteers -both had to be cancelled. NAT quickly responded after 23 March by closing their sites and locking the car park at the town. As a result, there were no guided tours last year. On a positive note, we did welcome some hotel guests to a tour of our test pit excavations in August and we were delighted to promote sales of Will's long-awaited new guidebook! Andrew also spent some of the HLF Covid fund money on two megaphones, which we practiced using in his garden in September! These will enable us to be heard while conducting socially distanced tours and at the same time, developing our biceps!

Recently the Outreach Group tour guides have been feeling confident enough to venture forth. We held three sessions where guides, both experienced and new to the job, met at the town and had a walk round blowing off cobwebs, dredging through our atrophied lockdown brains, exchanging ideas, and delighting in the newly returned swallows, while relishing the song of skylarks -it really did feel very special to be out there again.

In the meantime, NAT have appointed a new Volunteers Co-ordinator, Jules Armour, who I have also met. She and Natalie have lots of ideas about moving NAT, and consequently Caistor more into the spotlight. Weekly tours started on Sunday 9 May. At present they have to be booked through Eventbrite and no more than five people can come, in order to comply with government guidelines, but we are hoping that this will be relaxed soon and we can simply take round all those who turn up at 2.30 on Sunday afternoon and Wednesdays throughout July and August. The Battlefields Trust have also booked to come and visit the site and the dig in August, following a very well received Zoom talk from Will in the winter.

Like many custodians of historic sites and monuments, NAT properties have been victims of increased vandalism and antisocial behaviour during the past year. In response to this, they are holding a day at Caistor (hopefully 17 July) with police and other agencies aimed to raise awareness of the problems and encourage our visitors to be vigilant and report any problems.

A date for your diaries: Heritage Open Day at Venta will be Sunday 12 September. The theme this year is Edible England, so plenty of stuffed dormouse!! If anyone is willing to help out, please contact me: [crpoutreach58@gmail.com](mailto:crpoutreach58@gmail.com)

Trustees have agreed not to start any education activities yet, as schools have got enough to contend with and we want to re-launch our programme in more settled times. However, some will be brushing up our site activities when we welcome a group of 30 Cubs to the site one evening this month -of course, we'll Do Our Best!



*Trialling the new CRP megaphones in Andrew's garden. With many thanks to Elsabe Ray for the photo!*



## The changing view of *Venta Icenorum* – Will Bowden

It has been a quiet year on the digging front but sometimes an enforced pause can have benefits, allowing time to reflect on what has been learnt through our recent campaigns and to consider future directions. There can be no doubt that the temple excavations have changed our understanding of the Caistor landscape. The temple in its later and most grandiose phase represents a considerable investment by the inhabitants of *Venta Icenorum*. The 2m-deep foundations of the central *cella* demonstrate that it would have been a tall building, forming a dominant landmark in *Venta*'s surroundings. The construction of such an exceptional building, outside a town whose public buildings were otherwise fairly small and unspectacular, is a graphic indication of the importance placed on the site (and its associated cult(s)) by the inhabitants.

The importance of the site is also evident from earlier in its history, with finds indicating an Iron Age presence and an early temple building erected around the same time that the first buildings were going up in the town itself. These discoveries indicate that the temple site was a focal point in the *Venta* landscape from the start of the town's history if not before. It may be that the presence of the cult was a principal reason for the establishment of the Roman capital of the Iceni *civitas* at this location in Norfolk.

The temple excavations are part of CRP's long-term focus on the area to the north-east of the Roman town. This was an area that we envisaged as holding the key to understanding the development of the town in the early Roman period. Slowly the pieces are coming together and we are starting to see a much more complex story than we had before, perhaps with a pre-Roman focus around the temple and hotel. The Roman town itself may have developed on the flat unoccupied land on the east bank of the Tas as an adjunct to this earlier centre of activity.

We are starting, therefore, to get a clearer picture of the wider Caistor region as an archaeological landscape. Although on one level we had an awareness of this before, I think that by focusing on the areas beyond the town and spending so much time at Temple Field, at Old Hall and in the village, we are also changing our own mental maps of the landscape. All of us now see the walled Roman town as one element of a much bigger picture which we are slowly coming to understand.



*The archaeology of the Caistor region, based on aerial photographs digitised by the English Heritage-sponsored National Mapping Programme, geophysical survey and excavation. NMP data copyright English Heritage National Mapping Programme licensed to Norfolk County Council. Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and Database Right (2017) OS (Digimap Licence).*



## CAISTOR ROMAN PROJECT

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Will Bowden: Project Director

Alex Atherton: Education/Outreach/Site Support

Wendy Bylett: Tas Valley Farmstead Project/Health & Safety

Val Cossey: Administration/Publicity

Rhiane Keely: Excavation Coordinator

Caroline Lowton: Community Liaison

Mike Pinner: Research Coordinator

Andrew Ray: Treasurer

Andy Woodman: Operations Manager/Bulk Finds/Barn

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### NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST LIAISON

Natalie Butler

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*Overleaf: images of finds and fieldwork from work at Caistor Hall Hotel and Caistor Old Hall (Ian Jackson)*