



# CAISTOR ROMAN PROJECT



Annual Report 2021-22



## CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

CRP has continued to make good progress with our main aims over the last year, despite a few extra difficulties caused by the covid restrictions. Trustees and members have worked hard and produced excellent results, as can be seen in this report.

No doubt we were all glad to get out on site for some tremendous archaeology when excavating and researching at Temple Field in August 2022. This was a very successful dig engaging over 50 members and many students from University of Nottingham, UEA and Lowestoft College. We were fortunate to have a visit from Lord Dannatt, Royal British Legion Norfolk Patron to mark our link with RBL, as well as a group from the Restoration Trust, as we develop our approach to encouraging a wide range of people from all walks of life, and abilities, to get involved in archaeology – vital to our work as a community archaeology group.

Our researches at Temple Field have transformed our understanding of the site, demonstrating that the temple was a multi-phase structure, with origins contemporary with the early stages of activity at the Roman Town itself, and indications that the location of the temple reflects a pre-Roman cult site. Critical and exciting pointers which add much to the 'Caistor Story'.

As Caroline Lowton reports, in the post-pandemic period, mental health and well-being issues have become evident. Our work with the RBL and Restoration Trust have therefore been important over the last year to open archaeology to all. We have continued working with Operation Nightingale to bring their work on the rehabilitation of injured military veterans to CRP.

Work at the barn continued successfully – an important part of CRP in cleaning, identifying and cataloguing finds and providing regular 'get togethers' for members and a good way for new members to get involved in CRP's practical work. Our review of storage and processing needs continues – a key issue before us is the future of the barn and its operations.

Membership has remained healthy. Although our fees have to increase again next year, we believe this represents excellent value bearing in mind the tremendous research and excavation opportunities we offer to members, at a time when many archaeology groups charge considerable extra fees for participation in digging.

We have continued to have excellent support from a number of funders – it is only with these grants that we are able to undertake much of our researches including excavations. We are grateful for their support. Our partners have also given us much support and encouragement. We have worked closely with Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society and Norfolk Archaeological Trust in particular. Our partnership with Caistor Hall Hotel has also developed over the last year and new opportunities are opening up with Brasted's, the new owners, as their exciting development plans for the site come to fruition. We are also grateful to Chris and Daniel Skinner of High Ash Farm for their continuing support.

It goes without saying that the enthusiastic support of Antony Jarrold, our Patron, is highly valued – his encouragement and local knowledge has been important to CRP especially during the difficulties of the pandemic.

Finally, we should all be incredibly thankful that we have such a dedicated and hard-working group of trustees. Many members of course contribute to our successes over the years, but I have no doubt that the work and commitment of the trustees have been key to all that we do – thank you!

Alan Pask



## Research in 2021—Mike Pinner, Research Coordinator

What a pleasure it was to get back into the field in August! With covid still hovering on the periphery, it was necessary to do things that we didn't want to do - like limit use of our marquee and cancel open days and some tours as well as asking members to take part in extra cleaning. Thanks to everyone for their forbearance.

As with our last major outing in 2019, over 50 members took part in the dig as supervisors, diggers or soil sifters. Once again, it was an impressive demonstration of what CRP can do when members work together on a project. In addition, we were joined by students from Nottingham, UEA and Lowestoft Sixth Form College. They were supported by Neil Moss, who helped fulfil our ambition to teach as well as to gain support from students for our tired limbs! We were also joined by an additional professional, Sarah Leppard, who offered oversight and support to keep Giles sane and awake throughout! Given the necessary restrictions that we had to work with, we achieved our aims and had a happy and fruitful season on Temple Field. Those involved will recall that we undertook additional research work on the extent and phasing of the ancillary building to the north of the temple as well as an investigation of the temenos wall to the west. Work is presently under way on the post-excavation process and we will keep members updated on progress. My sincere thanks to all who helped with a cohesive operation, to our professionals and to the membership at large.

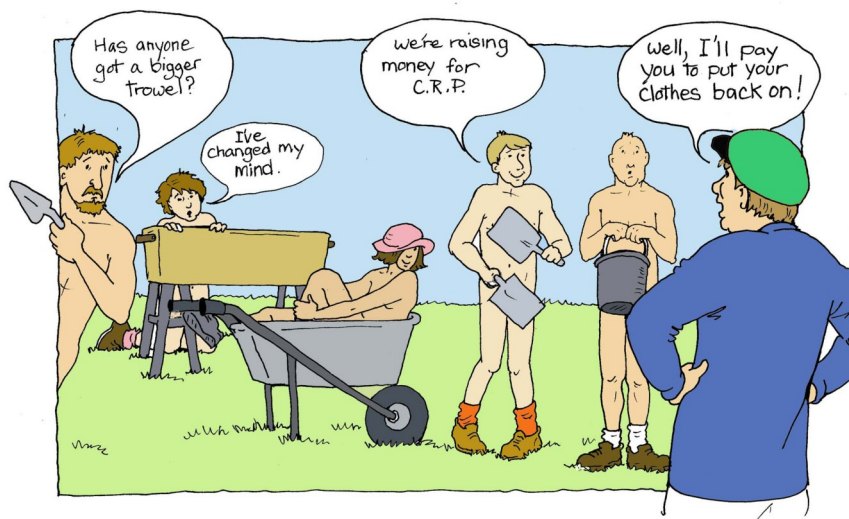
We are now engaged on the development of further research work around Friston Field to the south of the temple as well as several other small-scale pieces of work which we may be able to undertake. I am acutely aware that the covid epidemic has led to some fracturing of the close relationship that many of us felt through working with CRP. It's important that we do something about that in the next few months and I am working with other trustees to provide additional opportunities to learn and enjoy together.

## Membership and finance - Andrew Ray , Treasurer

Our membership charges increased from £30 per year to £40 (or £15 to £20 for students) at the start of 2022 and as expected membership declined but only slightly from 107 to 96. Perhaps this is because our membership charges compare favourably with both other archaeological groups and voluntary societies generally.

However, the vast bulk of our funding comes from charitable trusts either specialising in archaeology or locally focussed. Income from specialised funds in 2021 was mainly from the Roman Research Trust (£5000) and the Headley Trust (also £5000), a Sainsbury family charity interested in promoting a community-based approach to archaeology. Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society (NNAS) again funded us with £1000, and memberships contributed just over £3600.

All this has left us with £26200 in the bank at the start of 2022 which may sound healthy but with costs of digging running at £15000 to £16000 for two weeks and overheads another £9000 is in fact just enough to see us through 2022. Our overheads have increased substantially mainly because the barn rental will more than triple to £8400. Fundraising is therefore a priority this year and we welcome assistance from members with what remains a challenging task in the current financial climate. We were therefore very pleased to receive an additional £5000 from the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society just before this report went to press.



*The treasurer is always looking for fund-raising suggestions, although the 2022 calendar proved problematic! (Jenny Press)*



## Metal Detecting Surveys at Caistor Old Hall and Caistor Hall Hotel

- Rob Bylett and Ian Jackson

The primary goal of these surveys was to recover and record evidence of historic occupation and activity in a systematic manner. Both surveys required the team to respond to the opportunities as they arose. The first of two surveys was conducted at Caistor Old Hall, where we were asked to complete a survey prior to the formation of a wild-flower meadow. The weather was terrible throughout the survey, with heavy rain, hail, sun, and wind. A number of metal artefacts, mostly coins, were discovered, as well as a small number of Roman pottery sherds and worked flints. The second survey was conducted on the large paddock to the south of the Caistor Hall hotel building, excluding the Scheduled area excavated by Surgeon Commander F R Mann in the 1930s. Because of the terrain, the survey was difficult. The grass was dense, and the ground was uneven. Significant amounts of scattered metallic waste elicited negative responses. Except for a decorative portion of what appears to be a late Romano-British bracelet, the absence of artefacts other than a small number of coins was notable.



*Left: surveying at Caistor Old Hall.*

*Below: multiple motif Romano-British bracelet from Caistor Hall Hotel survey.*

### **Brief summary of finds: from Old Hall**

One hundred and ten metal objects were recovered including fifty three coins and two tokens. The dateable finds fell into two distinct periods i.e. Romano-British and Post-Medieval. The earliest Roman find was an incomplete copper alloy brooch of the Hod Hill type dating to between AD 40-70 whilst the latest was a coin of the Emperor Gratian (reign AD 364-378). The earliest Post-Medieval find was a Charles I rose farthing dated to AD 1636 – 1644 whilst the latest dateable find was a penny of George V from 1921. Notable non-coin finds included a complete Roman ring key, a 17<sup>th</sup> C seal matrix, a Roman horse harness pendant, almost identical to the one found in the same area during the 2017 excavations, and a trade token advertising the wares of F L Hausberg of Liverpool, a purveyor of high class wares including desks, dressing cases, lamps and chandeliers. One find, a possible money clip, bore the monogram HW. Subsequent research provided a likely link to one Henry Wharton shown as residing at Old Hall in the 1881 census.





## Brief summary of finds from Caistor Hall Hotel Paddock

Forty four metal objects were recovered including 27 Roman coins, and a medieval short cross penny. The earliest identifiable coin is a very nice denarius struck in the name of the Emperor Hadrian (reign AD 98 – 117). Of particular note were two Roman coins struck at mints which are less commonly encountered in Caistor coin assemblages, namely Siscia which was in the Roman province of Pannonia (modern day Croatia) and Nicomedia which is in modern day Turkey. Perhaps the most noteworthy find from this particular survey was an incomplete copper alloy Romano-British multiple motif bracelet. The metal is of a high quality and the variety of decoration present is very striking. Whilst no exact parallel has yet been found this type of bracelet is typically given a date of AD 250 – 400.

## Publicity—Val Cossey

As usual, *Current Archaeology* (issue No. 380) ran a comprehensive report, 'Reinterpreting the Priest's House' on the August 2021 excavation after Carly Hilts visited in the second week. Her article generated some correspondence subsequently (issue No. 382) about the robbing out of the corners of buildings in the auxiliary building. The EDP ran a full-page article on the excavation (August 14), and ITV Anglia sent a reporter and cameraman to interview Will and Alan and also give an overall view of the site: the piece went out as part of the local tea-time TV news bulletin towards the end of the second week.



*Pictured at Caistor Roman Project's temple field site in August 2021 are (left to right) Colin Hartley - Chairman of Loddon and District Branch, ex-Royal Engineer; Lee Harper - Branch member and ex-Royal Anglian Regiment; Christine Hartley - Branch Secretary and Colin's wife.*

(Ian Jackson)

## The British Legion and CRP—Val Cossey

Christine and Colin have been members of the Caistor Roman Project (CRP) for some five years now, and before that took part in test-pitting around Loddon for Anglo-Saxon archaeology. Lee joined last year and immediately made an impact with his skill in helping put up the large marquee which forms the base for CRP's excavation operations. Christine and Colin are expert sievers, getting through tons of soil in their search for artefacts dug up from the trenches and all three join in at the Project's depot where finds from the digs are processed. Christine's brother Mick is also a member and a regular at the annual excavations. Through Colin and Christine, CRP contacted the Royal British Legion to see if they could help in finding veterans that would be willing to get involved, under the umbrella of Operation Nightingale, a Ministry of Defence programme for veterans run by Richard Osgood, of 'Digging for Britain' fame. Ideally, CRP would like to have both RBL and Operation Nightingale members working together at its next dig.



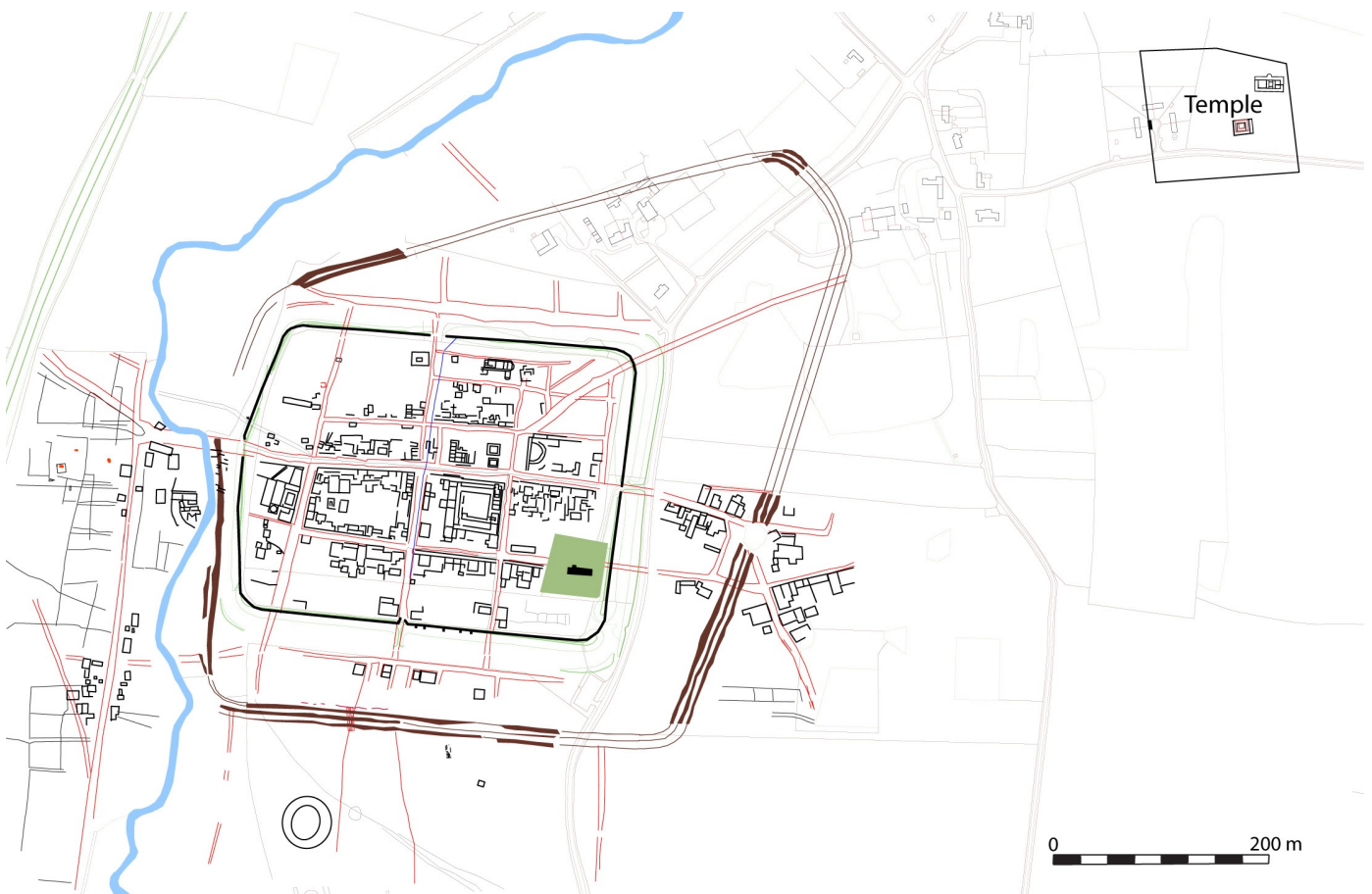
## Three seasons at the Temple – where are we now? - Will Bowden

It was 2017 when we first carried out geophysical survey at the temple site, followed by two seasons of excavation in 2018 and 2019. Despite the interruption of the pandemic in 2020, we were able to return in 2021 and revisit the so-called auxiliary building as well as exploring the north-west corner of the temple precinct. Although the long process of post-excavation is still ongoing, we know a lot more about the temple than we did four years ago. But what have these excavations told us about Caistor as a whole?

It has long been clear that the temple occupied a major place in the Caistor landscape. The temenos wall enclosed an area that was approximately a quarter of the size of that of the walled town and the town and the temple were clearly linked by a road that ran at a 45 degree angle to the rest of Venta's street grid. The striking divergence of this road from the orientation of the town plan has long been noted. Our 2010 excavations of this road within the town indicated that it was laid out as a gravelled street during the 2nd century, rather than representing a pre-Roman route as had been previously surmised. The road ran between the two temples of the town, excavated by Donald Atkinson, and the extra-mural temple. Certainly by the start of the 2nd century, when the road was laid out, this link between these two cult sites was already significant.

The 2019 excavations indicated that the earliest masonry phases of the temple were contemporary with the early phases of the town's forum (identified in 2011). It seems that in the later 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, as the first public buildings of the town were being erected, it was considered important to erect a masonry structure at the temple site as well. Along with buildings like the forum, the creation of formal buildings for religion was an innovation in the region, although we know relatively little of Icenian religious practice in the Iron Age.

Why was it so important to create a formal structure at this site? Although we can't know for certain, the 2019 and 2021 excavations produced considerable quantities of Iron Age pottery, with one small 2m x 1m trench in 2021 producing more Iron Age pottery than came from the 13 trenches that we dug in and around the walled town in 2009-12. The nature of this Iron Age presence cannot be determined but it seems reasonable to suggest that it was a cult site that saw new investment early in the Roman period. Indeed the presence of an adjacent major Iron Age cult site may explain why *Venta Icenorum* developed where it did.





Whatever its origins, it is absolutely certain that the temple site was significant to the local population, at least judging from the scale of investment in the site. The early temple was replaced by a much larger structure, probably in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. This is the same moment that a new forum was built in the town. The fact that the forum was one of the smallest *fora* in Roman Britain while the new temple was one of the largest examples of its type, gives a graphic indication of the priorities of the local population.

The 2021 excavations also targeted the so-called auxiliary building, building on the results from 2018. The function of this structure remains elusive but, like the temple, it was built on a scale and with a monumentality that sets it apart from the buildings within the town. Its huge foundations suggest that at least part of the building was two storeys high, while the finds of “cheese triangle” bricks indicate the presence of brick-built columns. These would have either supported a portico or have been built into the façade of the building as a decorative feature. In either instance they would probably have been plastered and painted to resemble marble. This fake marble decoration was a key feature of the building, which was lavishly painted.



*The auxiliary building (showing at least two construction phases) (Geoff Lunn)*

What was the auxiliary building? We can't say for certain but a reasonable case can be made for it being an additional cult building, containing shrines for one or more deities. Indeed the auxiliary building produced the only confirmed evidence of an identifiable deity in the form of a fragment of a Venus figurine. A series of apparently purposeful deposits of oyster shells around the auxiliary building are also suggestive of a cult site.

Finally the excavations on the north-west corner of the *temenos* enclosure produced some intriguing clues as to the activities that occurred at the site. The precinct wall would

have had a number of purposes. It defined the site and perhaps excluded people from going inside or even seeing what went on within the precinct. Perhaps you had to pay to enter or were only allowed inside on particular occasions.



*Left: Venus figurine (Ian Jackson); Right: Medical probe (Giles Emery)*

The discovery of a gravelled surface to the west of the *temenos* (on the town side) allows us to imagine an area outside the precinct where stall-holders hawked their wares to pilgrims, as happens at any modern pilgrimage site. The discovery of what appears to be a bronze medical probe is certainly compatible with this picture as we can imagine physicians in this market-place, selling practical remedies to those who had come to the temple to seek spiritual cures for their ailments.

The temple excavations have painted a vivid picture of the development of what was undoubtedly a key point in the landscape of the Iceni territory. The size and exceptional monumentality of the site in comparison with the town itself clearly show its significance. It also further undermines the idea of the Iceni as impoverished. Certainly in the case of the temple site, the local population or individuals were able to invest in buildings that compared favourably to any religious site in Roman Britain.

*Left: Painted wall plaster from the auxiliary building; Right: Iron Age pottery from beneath the auxiliary building (Giles Emery)*





## Community relations – Caroline Lowton

In this post-pandemic era Mental Health and Well-being issues have come to the forefront and, in the face of this increasingly global problem, medical practitioners and charitable organisations are urgently seeking ways of tackling the tide of distress caused by lockdowns and social disruption.

In this climate of concern, the CRP trustees were keen to play their part in promoting Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), which also embraces Mental Health and Well-being. It was serendipitous that we came across Restoration Trust whose aims were to improve mental health through culture therapy, and who had recently completed a project at Burgh Castle in partnership with Norfolk Archaeological Trust. Caistor Roman town was an ideal setting for replicating this project bringing together archaeology, creativity and well-being. Restoration Trust recruited a small group of participants, people living with mental health challenges, drawn from Julian Support and the Matthew Project in Norwich, and invited them to join four pilot sessions in the autumn of 2021. My thanks go to Alex Atherton, Wendy and Rob Bylett, Andy Woodman and Ian Jackson for stepping forward to give talks, overviews and a show-and-tell session, all of which made these sessions a success story, and we are excited about the possibility of repeating this exercise at a later date. I should also like to thank the ladies at the Church for their cooperation in opening up the Church for our use, and of course to the RT and Matthew Project coordinators, Darren France and Robin Hales and their colleagues.

Mention has been made before of Operation Nightingale's early recognition of archaeology's benefits in the rehabilitation of injured military personnel. The Royal British Legion has similarly played a significant role in this field and so we were particularly delighted to invite the Patron of Norfolk's RBL, General the Lord Dannatt to visit our Temple dig in the summer and to learn more about the work of CRP. The highlight of the visit was his introduction to a group of RBL veterans, men who had fought in a number of theatres of war and who had remarkable stories to tell. It was a very poignant moment, and I should like to thank our members Christine and Colin Hartley for making this very touching event possible. Thanks should also go to our RBL veteran volunteer Lee, who did sterling work erecting the dig marquee!

Finally, we were delighted to welcome another cohort of UEA students to join the Summer dig alongside Will's Nottingham group and not forgetting Mike Pinner's sixth form students from Lowestoft. All of the students were immensely helpful and to quote one of the trustees: 'they were so interested and keen to learn, coming round the trench several times a day to see what was going on and asking lots of questions.' It's lovely to hear that these young people are enjoying archaeology as much as the rest of us - they are, after all, the future!



*Lord Dannatt meets members of the Royal British Legion on site (Andy Woodman)*



## Education and Outreach—Alex Atherton

Not surprisingly 2021 was a relatively quiet year for the Outreach teams, mainly because there were no Education activities. However, on an unseasonably chilly May evening we did welcome 30 youngsters from 1st Blofield and Brundall Cubs.

Their leader wrote back saying *'All the Cubs had a great evening discovering about Caistor Roman Town - I think we could have done with a little more time but apart from that the evening was a success!'*

As we emerge from Covid it looks like schools are starting to re-engage for this coming summer term which is encouraging.

Our weekly Sunday tours started on 9 May and ran until 26 September, and Wednesday afternoons throughout July and August. In order to comply with Covid regulations, visitors were asked to book online through NAT, which inevitably meant that the number of people fell, but we still welcomed many from far and wide and we were able to train and mentor two new guides from the ranks of CRP. In July we had a visit from Tharston & District WI.

Dig Open Days were another casualty of the pandemic, but we were delighted to welcome some pre-arranged groups who came to visit both the town and be taken round the excavations: The East Anglian branch of the Battlefields Trust, Essex Historical Association and Bergh Apton History Group.

Ian Mason, Chair of Essex Historical Association wrote a blog full of praise for the day: unfortunately this is no longer available to view, but he wrote the following in his email: *'We loved your company and enthusiasm for Venta Icenorum. Very many thanks for Professor Bowden's important work at your amazing Romano-British site. I enjoyed sharing my passion for coins with your Finds Officer [Ian Jackson]. Once again, we're obliged to you for a significant day for us.'*

Several of the guides also made active contributions to the Restoration Trust project, spearheaded by Caroline Lowton, and we look forward to further such worthwhile schemes. Tours recommence in late April. If you are interested in getting involved in any of our outreach work, either as a tour guide or working with school groups please contact me at [crpoutreach58@gmail.com](mailto:crpoutreach58@gmail.com).

Many thanks to Lynda Bradley, Rob Bylett, John Davies, Tim Delaney, Franz Plachy, Andrew Ray, Dave Smedmore, Gary Watson and Jim Webber for all their help with these activities.



*Members of the 1st Blofield and Brundall cubs learn about the Roman town (Alex Atherton)*



## The barn – Andy Woodman

It was another successful year at the barn: we managed to prepare for the summer excavation and complete the post-excavation cleaning, sorting and quantifying ready for reporting before the winter shutdown.

Following a comprehensive survey of barn space last year, we have recently started a project to reduce our footprint in the barn ready for any move and to dispose of old and unwanted equipment, and will soon be preparing for and following up on this year's excavation work.

*The summer bulk finds packed up to go back to the barn*



### Many thanks to:

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*Back cover: Images from the 2021 dig (Andy Woodman)*



