



Registered Charity No. 1131293

VOLUNTEERS' UPDATE ISSUE No.8 November 2009

Welcome to the first update following the dig.

Our volunteers

There are currently 159 volunteers registered. Over 50 new volunteers were recruited during the excavations last month.

The field walking program – where are we?

The program has got off to a splendid start this season with Andrew Ray's group making the first walk on 4th October and currently the number of outings stands at 14. At the moment there are plenty of fields available and while the weather holds there will be plenty of opportunities for everyone to enjoy the outdoor life.

The field walking groups

With the new influx of volunteers some of the groups have become very large and so the number and size of the groups is still being considered. If anyone's circumstances have changed since they registered with the project and they wish to either switch to another group or withdraw from the walking program please contact Hazel Leese (details at the end of this update).

Still on the theme of the larger groups, with more volunteers participating on each walk there may become an issue with parking. It would seem sensible to look at car sharing to avoid any potential problems and all volunteers are urged to consider the idea and to get together with fellow walkers.

The list of flexible walkers currently stands at 14 volunteers. If anyone is regularly available to join in walks organised for groups other than their own please contact Hazel Leese (details at the end of this update).

Finds

Last season's field walking finds are awaiting delivery to Gressenhall for identification and recording.

The excavation finds have all been washed and bagged and are awaiting a final sort before they go off to various specialists for identification and recording. The human skeletal remains have been washed and are awaiting examination by Francesca, our Human Remains specialist.

Finds processing

In previous years the processing of field walking finds has been left until the warmer weather in the spring. However, it is anticipated that more fields will be walked this season and it may be necessary to 'wash as we go' if the number of finds starts mounting up. To this end, as the weather forecast was pretty bleak for Sunday 1st, Andrew Ray's group took the opportunity to don marigolds and wash their accumulated finds. An excellent morning's work cleared five boxes of finds without losing any valuable walking time. Watch this space for further details.

The excavation

The big news for this issue has to be the Project's most successful first dig at the site of *Venta Icenorum*. For those volunteers who were not able to participate or visit the site during the dig, a series of photographs will appear in the Photo Gallery over the coming months in an attempt to show what they missed. The dig blog, another useful source of dig information, was also a great success and can be accessed by Googling 'Caistor Dig', a must for all.

Now a few facts and figures:

Visitors to the site were around 3600 over the three-week period.

Sales, including plastic swords, totalled £2491.78, realising a profit for the Project of just over £793.

Donations collected in the marquee totalled £675.16.

Many finds collected by members of the local community from the site over the years were donated to the Project during the course of the dig. These will provide the Project with much needed unstratified finds for display purposes and handling exercises.

It will be quite a while until there is a full understanding of what was actually found and everyone will be kept informed through regular updates, starting here with words from 'our Leader' Will Bowden:

The Results Of The Excavation

The dust is now settling from the excavation season and I hope to start getting to grips with the results properly soon. From my point of view it was an extremely successful season. Even though we didn't find the Iron Age, we added a huge amount to our understanding of the site and the nature of its archaeology. While it is still too early to draw hard and fast conclusions, it is possible to make a few suggestions about what we found.

First, in Trench 1 (the large one) it is now apparent that we are looking at a complex landscape created through glacial action. In particular we are looking at cryoturbation (a great word which I got from Giles which basically means frost churning), which produces (among other things) circular patterns in the ground. This is presumably what we saw on the geophysics. What this means for some of our other circular features is difficult to say, although I think we would have to test some more of them to be sure. It is clear that there is Iron Age activity on the site (even if we only found one gully)! Trench 1, however, produced a sequence of much greater antiquity than we had been expecting, and the probable Mesolithic levels in particular were a great bonus, extending the archaeological sequence at the site by several millennia.

Trench 2, meanwhile, produced the first confirmed discovery of human remains from Caistor, indicating that (perhaps unsurprisingly) a significant cemetery lies beneath the south field. The adult bodies that we found appear to be what are commonly referred to as "deviant" burials. These are individuals who, for whatever reason, are buried in an abnormal way (i.e. not in a supine position). These are often seen as representing the graves of criminals or other outsiders. We initially thought that our principal burial was deformed in some way but the bones shown no obvious sign of any deformity. Nonetheless, the discovery of such a cemetery is intriguing and might repay further investigation.

The church trench produced the greatest quantity of Roman material from the excavations, dating particularly from the later Roman period. Perhaps the most striking aspect was that the earliest features seemed to be late Roman in date, suggesting that this area of the town may have seen relatively little activity in the early Roman period. Hopefully, the continuation of the church's extension project will allow us to examine more of these levels.

As more of the material is examined and processed in the coming months, I will be able to refine and add to these initial musings so watch this space.

What else is going on?

"Finds Sessions" – with Andrew Rogerson (Principal Landscape Archaeologist at Gressenhall). It was most unfortunate that both Finds Sessions arranged earlier this year had to be cancelled. The plan was to re-schedule these sessions for later in the year but now walking has started it has been decided to put them on hold until the New Year, again watch this space for details.

Freya has landed – all participants of the dig will be delighted to hear that Giles is now the proud father of a beautiful baby girl – Freya. Many congratulations go to Giles and Kate, well done both!

Photo Gallery – this issue is dedicated to some of the splendid photos taken at the dig, starting on Monday 24th August (Day 1) covering the main stages of the excavation preparations and set-up. Thanks go to everyone who supplied copies of their photographs.



Day 1 The south field at Venta Icenorum, which was the site for two trenches. Another two were being excavated on behalf of the church in the churchyard.



Dave Bescoby laying out the Trench 2 in the churchyard.



Day 2 Metal detecting Trench 1 in the churchyard. Plastic tent pegs were used to mark all the detector-hit spots.



This newspaper cutting shows Atkinson's sod cutting ceremony in 1929.



Day 2 Sod cutting ceremony 2009. The idea was to recreate the original ceremony with representatives from the Norfolk Archaeological Trust, the Caistor Roman Project and its sponsors.



Day 2 The first of the three deliveries from our wonderful sponsors May Gurney and A Plant arrive. These containers were closely followed by all the bright shiny brand new equipment.



Day 2 The fencing arrives and later in the day the chemical toilets make their appearance.

Day 3 Turf stripping begins.



Day 4 Turf stripping continues with a welcome break when all bodies were summoned to help get the marquee erected.



Up she goes.



Then it's back to turf stripping.



Day 4 Also saw Sheep Poo collecting on a grand scale.



Day 4 Turf stripping.



Turf stripping results. The archaeology was much deeper and the ground much harder than anticipated so late on Day 4 the machines were called in.



Day 5 Machine stripping was certainly much quicker and a lot more fun.



The previously small spoil heaps begin to grow as Mick discovers the joys of dumper truck driving.



By the end of Day 5 base camp and 3 of our 4 trenches are ready for the official first day of the dig.

Next update

Your comments about this issue and requests/ideas for items for future issues would be welcomed.

Please send your comments to Dave & Hazel Leese at: solutions_leese@hotmail.com or telephone them on 01493 781781.