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Starting the New Year

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Caistor Clarion

The important stuff

We still need volunteers to **sign up for membership**. This is important for our future, enabling us to continue using the Kirby Bedon barn as our HQ and for undertaking a full programme of activities. If you wish to be an active member and join our excavations or test pit programmes, participate in surveys, geophys, finds processing, field walking and training for all these activities then full membership costing £20 will be required. There is a £10 option for 'Friends' who will receive the Clarion and have some access to events but not at discounted prices. Details are shown on the membership form, downloadable from caistorromanproject.org/forms/CRP_membership.pdf and you are requested to sign up now.

And that leads neatly on to introducing Vicky Hawkes, our **new Membership & Social Secretary**, who writes:

I am proud to say that I have been involved with the Caistor Roman Project from the very beginning and have helped at all the digs (yes, I have done my fair share of finds washing and field walking), despite my work at the UEA placing limitations about when I could take leave. I still work at the UEA but now have a bit more flexibility - hence I have volunteered for this new role!

However I do need some help, and in particular with suggesting suitable places to visit. I am hoping to arrange a couple of trips over the course of the year, ideally to places that help to improve our knowledge and understanding of the Caistor site, so please put forward your ideas of places that are manageable in a day.

If you have any membership related queries you can email me – vixter437@tiscali.co.uk - or come and speak to me at the Briefing/Fundraising event on 26 February where I will have some paper copies of the form if you have not downloaded it.

There will be a **briefing-cum-fundraising event on Thursday 26 February** from 18.00 to 20.00 at the Caistor Hall Hotel. We hope as many as possible will support this important event. Villagers will also be invited. There will be a report back on the current HLF project (especially the test pitting around the village) when we will hear about progress, finds and results. A raffle will be held with some super prizes including a signed Norwich City football, two dinner for two vouchers and more. Free tea and coffee will be on hand and the bar will be open. The hotel will make a special menu available in the restaurant after the briefing at the very good price of £16.95 for two courses for two people. Don't worry if you are a single; we'll do some matchmaking to take advantage of the offer. Please email our new membership and social secretary, Vicky Hawkes, at vixter437@tiscali.co.uk if you will be at the briefing and direct to the hotel at info@caistorhall.com for dinner.

A note from Caroline Davison, Director of the Norfolk Archaeological Trust

What does the Norfolk Archaeological Trust *do*?

That is a question I've been asked many times since I took up my new role as Director of the Trust. My answer is that the Trust has been quietly acquiring, protecting and conserving sites and buildings of archaeological and historic interest in the county for over 90 years.

Early successes included saving significant buildings from demolition such as Pykerell's House, Norwich (one of the few thatched houses still left in the city); Greenland Fishery, Kings Lynn; and Bishop Bonner's Cottage, Dereham - despite setbacks caused by fire and bomb damage during the Second World War.

From the 1980s the Trust focused on archaeological sites in rural areas that were under increased threat from levelling and ploughing. As a result, we currently manage some of Norfolk's most significant archaeological sites, including Burgh Castle Roman Fort near Great Yarmouth, St Benet's Abbey, near Ludham and Caistor Roman Town.

All the sites managed by the Trust are open to the public during daylight hours at no charge and interpretation has been installed to enable visitors to understand the story of each place. Despite this, the Trust remains unknown to many people. I'm hoping that over the next few years this will change. In future there will be more opportunities for local people to get involved in helping the Trust to manage and conserve sites that they treasure.

At Caistor Roman Town I'm keen to explore ways of collaborating with the Caistor Roman Project, including support of future bids and projects, and extension of volunteering opportunities at the site. These will range from generally keeping an eye on the place during a daily walk with the dog, to more practical conservation work such as clearing scrub or mending steps. Other opportunities might include wildlife and molehill surveys, training to be a visitor guide, helping with school visits or organising events.

If you would like to be kept updated on upcoming volunteering opportunities and/or Trust news about the site please do email me and I'll add you to my mailing list: carolinedavison@norfarchtrust.org.uk . I look forward to hearing from you!

A message from Chrissy

Hi everyone and Happy New Year to all I have not seen in person.

I am away for a few weeks but as soon as I return we will need to pull out the stops, so here are a few items for you to note.

- I am looking for a team of volunteers to deliver leaflets to all houses in the Caistor area to advertise and invite people to our fund raising and report back evening at the Caistor Hall Hotel on 26 February. Dates for this will be on the 5 to 8 February. E-mail me at brilix@icloud.com if you can help.
- We will need volunteers to help out during the evening of the 26 February. Most important will be talking to the locals but we also want to sell raffle tickets and merchandise as well signing up new volunteers. More information on this will follow.
- I am hoping to hold some workshops on the coins from the test pitting and one on the geology of our area as well as more processing of finds. Dates to be announced later.
PLEASE NOTE: You will need to be a full member, that is to have paid your £20

subscription, to attend these sessions as you will also need to be to dig when we start again in the next few months.

Thanks for all your hard work in 2014 and 2015 looks to be very busy with hopefully Easter and summer digs.

Chrissy

The Cradle of Humankind

Now here's something far from Caistor and the Romans: the Sterkfontein Caves and the Cradle of Humankind. Your intrepid editor visited them - an hour's drive north west of Johannesburg - over Christmas. The area is a World Heritage Site and justly so. It is here that the oldest remains of Homo Sapiens were found along with a variety of species that are either our ancestors or branches of development that are now extinct.

It is archaeology, Jim, but not as we know it, to borrow from Spock in Star Trek. We're dealing with the very start of our species 2.5 million years ago not some scrap between the Romans and a peripheral tribe the mere blink of an eye ago. Just get a grip on the timeline: the age of the earth is 6 billion years, the rocks at Sterkfontein 2.6 to 2.8 billion years, fossils up to 2.5 *million* years, our own species, homo sapiens sapiens, 100,000 to 200,000 years and Boudica less than 2000 years. And this area contains 35% of the entire earth's hominid fossils. Adding to my insecurity was the realisation that the use of tools predates our own species.

There are two main sites open to the public: the caves themselves and Maropeng, a museum display complex. The caves are spectacular, full of huge stalactites dripping eerily into cold dark pools. It was in these caves that the two most important fossil skulls, Mrs Ples and Littlefoot, were found. The original exploitation of the caves was for limestone to be used in the mining industry in the 1930s and it was during blasting that the first fossilised bones were discovered. Indeed the stone is so hard that dynamite continued to be used in the digging process. I did say it was archaeology but not as we know it.

Maropeng on the other hand has a large display of themes aimed mainly at school parties reflecting a rather PC view of life where we are all of the same ilk etc, etc, unfortunately stemming from the agonised history of South Africa. There is a display of tools found at the sites which I missed as I had begun to get bored with the preachiness. So I'm afraid much of my learning was from the website later (www.maropeng.co.za). Control of fire for cooking and comfort and the origins of language are among the fascinating topics dealt with there.

Yes, a good day out.

Dates for your diary

26 February, 18.00 to 20.00 Briefing on work in the village to date - Caistor Hall Hotel

10 March, 18.00 Digging Sedgeford - a people's archaeology - UEA Lecture Theatre 1

17 March, 18.00 The Binham Hoard - gold and power in early Anglo-Saxon Norfolk - UEA Lecture Theatre 1

14 April, 18.00 Rendlesham rediscovered - an East Anglian royal settlement of the time of Sutton Hoo - UEA Lecture Theatre 1

18 May, 19.00 CRP AGM and project briefing, open to all members - Caistor Hall Hotel

For more on UEA events go to www.uea.ac.uk/events

You are on this list as a key post holder

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