St. Benet’s Abbey report

The St Benet’s Abbey site, with its mill over the gatehouse and large wooden cross, is situated within Horning Parish and is owned by the Norfolk Archaeological Trust (NAT) with a lease over the abbey church area, which is still consecrated ground and owned by the Diocese of Norwich.

**The site** is constantly being monitored, and repairs carried out where needed. The private mooring/quay heading that is used for the Bishop of Norwich’s annual service, may need repair and is currently being assessed. The Norwich District Angling Association help with some maintenance and will be repairing the track at the entrance to the small carpark, which has become potholed. The large oak cross is leaning; in the care of the Diocese, it was surveyed last year to assess its condition.

Unfortunately, there has been several incidents of metal detecting, criminal damage (graffiti) and anti-social behaviour at the site, with the police notified on each occasion. The site is so isolated that it is difficult to monitor all visitors, but we are now very fortunate to have some volunteer Site Wardens who visit on a regular basis, and do a great job of checking the site and reporting back to NAT. They also undertake tidying and site maintenance. All residents and visitors are encouraged to call the Police if they see any criminal or anti-social behaviour at St Benet’s Abbey.

**Now for the good news**-

St Benet’s Abbey has thousands of visitors each year and this number has increased over the last 2 years. We currently have a small team of volunteers who are either Tour Guides, Meet & Greeters or Site Wardens.

**Free Tours** are at 2pm on Saturdays, Sundays and Wednesdays from 1st May to the end of September. They can be booked online at the NAT website (www.norfarchtrust.org.uk/visitor-guide/) or people can just turn up at the tour start point near the gatehouse/mill for 2pm to hear the stories and history of St Benet’s Abbey brought to life by the guides. The guided tours were able to go ahead in 2021 but had to be pre-booked to ensure numbers were limited, and for Test & Trace purposes.

St Benet’s Abbey recently featured on the tv series *‘The World’s Most Scenic River Journeys’* on Channel 5. Reverend David Smith, Rector of Horning Benefice and Prior of St Benet’s, spoke about its founding by King Cnut in 1019.

The annual open-air service that is led by the Bishop of Norwich, who is also Abbot of St Benet’s Abbey, is to be held at 3.30pm on 24th July this year. This service attracts many hundreds of visitors.

**St Benet’s Abbey needs more volunteers**

To enable this historic and atmospheric site to be looked after and enjoyed, NAT need more volunteers, who can choose to take on as much or as little as they feel able to do. You could be a tour guide with full training and resources given to you for the role. You could meet & greet some of the thousands of visitors and make them feel welcome. Or you could be a site warden, looking after this precious historical site and keeping it looking cared for and inviting. If you think you may be interested, please contact NAT Volunteer Coordinator, Jules Armour on julesarmour@norfarchtrust.org.uk for more information. She would love to hear from you.

Marion Jackson

St Benet’s Abbey Guide Coordinator. 27 April 2022