

## **Norfolk On-line Access to Cultural and Historic Environment Resources**

by David Gurney

### **Introduction**

For the archaeological profession today, one of the key challenges is *'to identify and understand the significance of the historic environment and communicate this to the wider world'* (English Heritage 2003, 18). The dissemination of information is central to research into and management of the historic environment, and vital to professional archaeologists, planning officers, elected members, contractors, consultants, researchers, local historians, students, lifelong learners and the general public. In this short paper I will describe how this challenge is being addressed in Norfolk, not only for archaeology, but for the wider historic environment and an assortment of cultural resources.

In Norfolk County Council's Department of Cultural Services, encompassing the Norfolk Library & Information Service, Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Service, the Norfolk Record Office and the Norfolk Arts Service, there is a steadily increasing volume of data held in a variety of systems (Galaxy, Calm 2000 and MODES), supporting the work of the various departments. Added value from that data can be released by the provision of totally integrated access to it, by combining and relating the material from various sectors 'on the fly' (i.e. the content is not pre-defined, but is created dynamically and rapidly). This is a solution that requires no data export or conversion and, furthermore, as soon as additional data is created on the host system it becomes instantly available.

### **NOAH (Plate I; Figure 1; Tables 1-3)**

In Norfolk, the key that opens the door to the combined on-line collections of Cultural Services within Norfolk County Council is NOAH (Norfolk Online Access to Heritage) to be found at [www.noah.norfolk.gov.uk](http://www.noah.norfolk.gov.uk). Whether the user's interest is in the historic environment, local or family history, art, architecture, the natural world or any other aspect of Norfolk's heritage and culture, NOAH provides access to the collections of archives, libraries and museums, showing images where they are available (Bullard 2001; Bullard 2002).

Currently, NOAH searches the entire library catalogue of 545,000 titles, over 200,000 museum objects and 25,000 images, about 16,000 digitised photographs, the index to over 23,000 local newspaper articles and over 63,000 archive records (Fig. 1). Not everything held by Norfolk County Council Cultural Services has an online record but new items are being added all the time, making this a service that can only grow and improve. In due course, a second tranche of data integration into NOAH will capture the datasets held by the Norfolk's Archaeology and Environment Division (within Norfolk Landscape Archaeology) – the Norfolk Biological Record (currently approaching one million records) and the Norfolk Historic Environment Record (40,000 records, including the Norwich Urban Archaeological Database) to which will be added the results from current National Mapping Programme, Historic Landscape Characterisation and Great Yarmouth Archaeological Map Projects.

Table 1 illustrates the results of a typical NOAH Search Result, in this case on the keyword 'Roman', which has located 3550 matches within 11 sources. Table 2 illustrates the first page of the Result List for resources within Picture Norfolk (local photographic collection) and Table 3 the Record View of the first record. Plate I shows the photograph referred to.

## East of England Archaeological Research Framework Review

Search Results		
Source	Search Status	Matches
Library Catalogue	Complete	2380
Local Newspapers Index (1922-1978)	Complete	65
Picture Norfolk (local photographic collection)	Complete	33
Cromer Museum	Complete	22
Great Yarmouth Museums	Complete	37
King's Lynn Museums	Complete	514
Norfolk Rural Life Museum	Complete	4
Social History (Norwich Museums)	Complete	36
Thetford Ancient House Museum	Complete	395
Norfolk Record Office	Complete	59
Regimental Museum database	Complete	5

**Table 1**

Title	Date
[1] Excavations - Caistor St.Edmund	1934
[2] Archaeological excavations, Caistor St. Edmund	1933
[3] The remains of a Roman tower at Caistor Watergate, Norwich	191-
[4] Excavations of the Roman Town at Caister-on-Sea	1951
[5] Roman Catholic Clergy, Costessey Hall	1909
[6] Roman villa, Grimston	1906
[7] Construction of St. John's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Norwich	18--
[8] Rectory, St. John's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Norwich	19--
[9] St. John's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Norwich	19--
[10] Altar, St John the Baptist Roman Catholic Cathedral, Norwich	19--

**Result List**  
Picture Norfolk (local photographic collection)  
**1 to 10 of 33** [Next >] [End >]

**Table 2**

Record View	
Picture Norfolk (local photographic collection) <b>1 of 33</b> [Next >] [Last >]	
Photographer	Plunkett; George A.F.
Title	Excavations – Caistor St. Edmund
Date	1934
Physical Description	1; photograph; b&w
Notes	General view of the excavations around south gate of Roman town (dated from AD 200). Prof. Atkinson's excavations
Copyright	Publication prohibited without the permission of George A.F. Plunkett
Keyword	Norfolk
Keyword	Caistor St. Edmund
Keyword	Romano-British
Keyword	Excavations
Keyword	Archaeology
Keyword	Nineteen-thirties
Keyword	Twentieth century
Photograph	
Click the thumbnail to view the image <b>1 of 33</b> [Next >] [Last >]	

**Table 3**

**The Norfolk E-Map Explorer (Figure 2)**

The Norfolk E-Map Explorer is our very recent project, funded by the New Opportunities Fund and part of the East of England Sense of Place consortium. This has digitised and will make available an assortment of previously dispersed and not particularly accessible resources.

The project has brought together:-

- 700 tithe maps
- 130 Enclosure Maps (fillings gaps in the tithe map coverage)
- 400 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey maps
- 9000 1946 RAF vertical aerial photos
- 4000 1988 Norfolk County Council vertical aerial photos
- and an assortment of other historic maps

These illustrate the landscape changing through time. The various resources are presented as seamless layers, with facilities to search by placename, postcode or grid reference, and then to compare any two resources side-by-side (Fig. 2), and then to change one or both resources from a pull-down list without having to conduct a new search. There are tools to pan in any direction, to zoom in and out, to overlay (the opacity is adjustable) and to measure areas and linear distance. It is also possible to view original maps. The Norfolk E-map Explorer can be found at [www.historic-maps.norfolk.gov.uk](http://www.historic-maps.norfolk.gov.uk)

**Norfolk Heritage Explorer (Figures 3-5)**

The Norfolk Heritage Explorer is still in the design and planning stage for a HLF bid, now nearing completion, to make a version of Norfolk's Historic Environment Record available online.

The Norfolk HER has an exceptionally long history stretching back to the 1930s when Rainbird Clarke first started logging sites and finds on index cards for the OS Map of Roman Britain. It now stands at 40,000 records, and grows at a rate of over one thousand new records each year. Its particular strength is in its inclusion of portable antiquities data from Norfolk's Identification and Recording Service for Archaeological Finds, recording on average around 15,000 objects per annum over the last five years. Chronologically, the Norfolk HER covers finds or monuments from the Palaeolithic (Wymer, this volume) to a 1980s DIY cold war bunker on the outskirts of Norwich (Edgeworth, this volume).

Due to the lack of resources and staff time, public access to the Norfolk Sites and Monuments Record/Historic Environment Record has never been actively promoted, although the numbers of enquiries received and dealt with are still high; 646 enquiries and BVPI 170 Museum Useages in 2003/4. Because of the nature of the Record and its compilation, most enquiries require HER or other staff time to make the information intellectually accessible. One of the key statistics to emerge from our public consultation work on this project – a MORI poll of the Norfolk Citizens' Panel – was that 60% of those consulted had never heard of the Norfolk HER (Fig. 3). More encouragingly, 64% were likely to use the HER if it was made more accessible (Fig. 4). Another significant fact to emerge is that, on average, there is an archaeological record for a location (HER polygon or point) within 200 metres of any house in Norfolk, presenting a real opportunity for professional archaeologists to talk to people about *their* community's archaeology, thereby making it real, making it local (Case, this volume).

## *East of England Archaeological Research Framework Review*

It is a massive task to achieve this, as the Norfolk HER developed as a professional management tool, with no real thought of making it available for general use. However, Clarke would surely have welcomed such an initiative, given his pioneering capture, synthesis and then dissemination of archaeological information to the public through, for example, his Anglia Television series *Once A Kingdom* of the early 1960s, and his state-of-the-art synthesis at that time of Norfolk and Suffolk (with a little Essex) in the book *East Anglia* (Clarke 1960).

The biggest challenge of all is to create simple user-friendly summaries from the largely unintelligible (to the public) information held on the HER and its associated files for 40,000 records (Fig. 5). We then intend to make this available on the web, with background information and educational and learning resources, and with spatial data presented as countywide distribution maps. We are convinced that this will be of national, regional and local interest.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is imperative that the archaeology profession takes every opportunity to demystify the historic environment and to make it increasingly intellectually and physically accessible. In the East of England Region much has been done already, but more is still locked away ready to be unleashed upon an unsuspecting public. By doing so, people might realise that the past is not just about barrows, forts, castles, moats, churches, Listed Buildings and other designated or 'special' places or obvious heritage attractions, but that the places where they live, work and play today sit within an historic environment which is probably richer, more varied, more complex and more interesting than they could possibly imagine.

### **References**

Bullard, S., 2001 *Getting Cultural Services Data Online. Together we can do more*. Paper given to the MDA Conference 2001.

Bullard, S., 2002 *Norfolk On-line Access to Heritage (NOAH) – A case study of Technical Interoperability between Museums, Libraries and Archives Digital Sources*. Paper given to Electronic Imaging & the Visual Arts (EVA) Conference, London.

Clarke, R., 1960 *East Anglia* (Ancient Peoples and Places vol. 14)(London).

English Heritage 2003 *Heritage Counts 2003. The State of England's Historic Environment*

Figure 1

