

Sheringham Shoal

by Scira Offshore Energy

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Archaeology uncovered

An unusual benefit of the offshore wind farm industry is the wealth of new archaeological information being uncovered during the consenting and pre-construction phases of each project. Sheringham Shoal Offshore Wind Farm has played a part in unearthing a number of archaeological treasures that highlight the historical significance of the North Norfolk area.

The onshore cable route

The subsea cables from the Sheringham Shoal project come to shore at Weybourne, from where power is transmitted via 23 kilometre onshore cables to a new substation at Salle. Before any work began on the onshore cable installation, and as part of the project's initial Environmental Impact Assessment, NAU Archaeology undertook a thorough archaeological investigation of the proposed route.

The archaeologists began with a desktop survey of known sites and progressed to a field-walking and metal-detector survey for the surface collection of finds along the entire route. Next was a geophysical survey of known cropmark sites as well as the excavation of evaluation trenches. A total of 125 trenches were dug, recorded and reinstated. The aim of these trenches was to identify any areas where there may be significant archaeological remains, which could possibly have been damaged or destroyed by construction works.

The evaluation phase identified three areas with potentially significant remains and therefore a programme of archaeological excavation was undertaken to record them.

Baconsthorpe

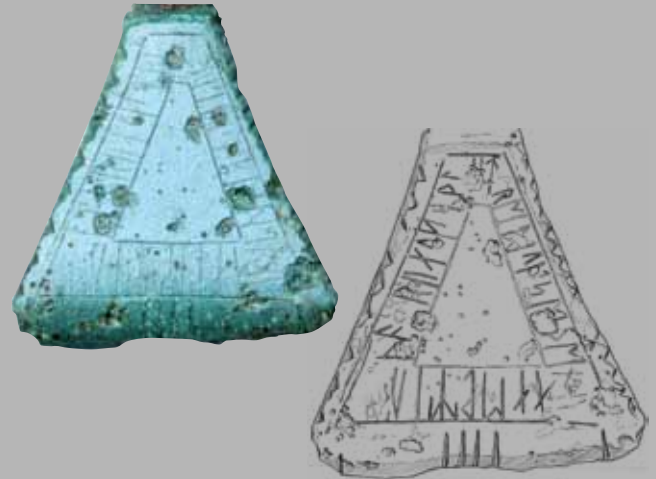
The Norfolk Historic Environment Record had already identified cropmarks and Roman finds, including a hoard of coins, in the surrounding fields. The project's initial evaluation also indicated the possibility of structural finds.

When excavated, the remains of a farmstead comprising at least two buildings and a corn drying kiln from Roman times were found. One building is likely to have been 'T' or cross shaped and may have been a workshop. The other building may have been a large timber barn and had unusual sill beam foundations.

Boundary ditches were found as evidence of a field system, which together with granite corn grinding stones suggested that this farm was used for arable rather than livestock production. As well five Roman coins were recovered, dated from the second and fourth centuries, together with Roman pottery and a tweezer arm with runic inscriptions (see side box).

Runic inscription on tweezer head

This item carries an inscription in Anglo-Saxon runes around its spatulate head. The runic script was developed for writing the Germanic languages, from which English descends, as early as the 2nd century and was first brought to England by Germanic settlers in the 5th and 6th centuries.



This inscription has a text of 30 tiny, finely inscribed runes. Dividing the continuous text into separate words it reads:

rede se pecuinneþæupasrunęawrat

Read whoso may. Beaw inscribed these runes.

This find has helped with the understanding of the development of runic writing in England in that the symbol **Λ** can now be recognised as the rune **ę**: a vowel sound that was changing in pronunciation in the English language at that time from what phoneticians would write [æ] (the sound heard in *cat*) to [ə] (the *-er* sound in words like *runner*).

Although the text may seem very simple, it implies a strong consciousness that reading is a difficult challenging skill. The inscriber, Beaw, is proud of his ability write. The structure of the sentence is found several times over in works of Old English literature, in forms such as 'read whoso will!'

This becomes all the more interesting as the object itself may be a page-holder: a form of light gripper, like a pair of tweezers, for holding and turning pages of a vellum manuscript – which would normally have been written in Latin and in the Roman script. If so, the challenge in the fine runic inscription will refer to that text as well.

Runes provided a traditional and quite informal medium for writing the English of everyday speech. Here, however, they seem to have been used in a learned context. Although they are found on a supplementary object to the main Latin text of a manuscript, there is little to suggest that this style of writing and the common language were considered markedly inferior to the international language of learning and the Church.

- with help from Professor John Hines

Little Barningham

Previously a Roman hoard had been found near Little Barningham and cropmarks of a trackway and enclosures, thought to date to the Roman period, had been noted on aerial photographs.

The field walking and metal detector survey recovered a large amount of material including several prehistoric flints, the mortar of a Roman cosmetics grinder, shards of medieval pottery and some undated metalworking slag. The follow-up geophysical survey revealed a complex pattern of rectilinear enclosures, and the evaluation trenching found several undated ditches as well as at least one ditch firmly dated from the medieval period.

The subsequent excavation revealed a small number of Neolithic, Iron Age, Roman and Early Anglo-Saxon features and artefacts. However, the majority of the excavated features were related to occupation that appeared to start in the 11th century and continued through the medieval period. There were no structural remains, but a significant amount of iron smithing slag was recovered as well as a large oven, perhaps used for baking. This suggests industry related to a small nearby agricultural settlement.



The large oven uncovered at Mere Farm, Little Barningham.

Heydon

Aerial photographs of this area show the cropmarks of a complex series of enclosures. The field-walking survey produced one prehistoric worked flint, three fragments of medieval pottery and one medieval coin. The geophysical survey identified a series of linear and curvilinear features broadly in alignment with those seen in aerial photographs. The evaluation trenching revealed a large number of ditches, but very little dating evidence.

The excavation revealed a cluster of Iron Age pits, a Roman ditch and a large number of medieval features and artefacts.



The excavated area of medieval settlement at Heydon Hall.

Monitoring

Each of the sites were monitored in liaison with planning advisors to ensure that anything of interest was either preserved in situ or by record. Items of interest such as the runic tweezers are currently held by NAU Archaeology.

As the offshore wind industry continues to develop potential sites and onshore cable routes and substation locations, it is likely further archaeological treasures will be unearthed to further the knowledge of earlier times.

Offshore unexploded ordnances

For the offshore part of the wind farm project, developer Scira Offshore Energy commissioned a thorough unexploded ordnances (UXO) survey as part of its preconstruction preparations. The survey covered around 44 square kilometres, including both the wind farm site and cable corridor.

The survey took almost four months, which was longer than anticipated, due to the use of a far higher technical specification than has been used for previous surveys of this type. EMU Limited, using the vessel RV Discovery, soft-towed four magnetometers and one side scan sonar just above the seabed to ensure the area was clear of potential hazards.

During the survey, a total of 52 targets were discovered – metallic items of 10 kilograms or above. Each item was further investigated by divers and with the use of a remote operated vehicle (ROV). While most of the targets were debris or geological concentrations, a 250lb air-dropped German WWII bomb was found and later safely detonated. A canon and a stock anchor were also found and both were reported and delivered to the authority body, Receiver of Wreck for cleaning and assessment.

Both the canon and the anchor can now be seen on display in The Mo, Sheringham's town museum.



The canon recovered following the unexploded ordnances survey.

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The Sheringham Shoal Offshore Wind Farm is owned equally by Statoil and Statkraft through the joint venture company Scira Offshore Energy Limited.