

The rediscovery of the crypt came about by chance; in 1779 a workman, digging a hole for a grave in the chancel floor, broke through the vaulting of south-west compartment of the crypt and tumbled headlong into it!

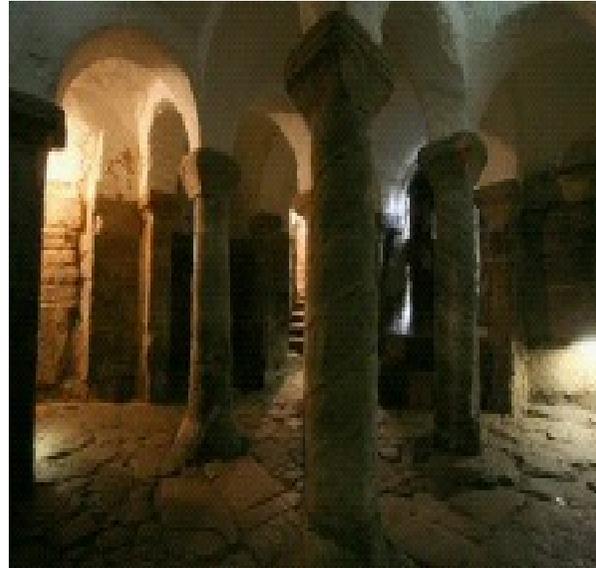
In 1802 a charnel-house (a building where human skeletal remains were stored), stood against the north wall of the chancel. This was removed in order to build a coach-house on the level ground, uncovering all the features round the crypt. Workmen rediscovered the steps leading to the door in the northern side of the crypt and replaced them with new steps beside the chancel, cutting away parts of the plinths.

Inside the church, the top 4 steps of the north flight to the crypt, date from 1886 when the level of the church floor was altered. •• The rails were added in 1937 as a memorial to Francis Shaw. • In 1950 the south-west stairway from the crypt was opened out and considerably repaired.

From 1974 to 1988 investigations within the church and major archaeological excavations around the church were carried out under the direction of Martin and Birthe Biddle and Harold Taylor. •• When they left, the area to the north of the chancel was landscaped and a short flight of steps running north-south was built to replace the nineteenth century flight, which had been damaged by the excavations.

In 1998 major restoration was carried out with generous help from English Heritage and the Getty Foundation.

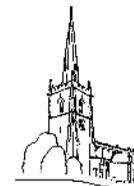
More information on the church can be found in leaflets in the church, and in Dr H.M.Taylor's book "St Wystan's Church Repton. A Guide and History" on sale in the church: and at the church website: reptonchurch.uk



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**Here in the quiet you may speak to God
Here you may cast your burdens on him
Here you may seek strength for the present and
courage for the future
Then go on your way rejoicing**

The Crypt



**St Wystan's Parish Church
Repton
Benefice of Foremark and Repton with Newton Solney
Diocese of Derby**

REPTON CRYPT is of exceptional interest.

It is one of the oldest and most important examples of Anglo-Saxon architecture to survive intact. Sir John Betjeman described it as

"holy air encased in stone"

The crypt was constructed in the first half of the 8th century during the reign of King Æthelbald, perhaps originally as a baptistery, partly underground, over a spring which was drained to the east by a deep stone-built channel. It was later converted into a mausoleum, perhaps to receive the body of King Æthelbald himself (reigned from 716 - 757), and became the final resting place of Mercian Kings. King Æthelbald (ob. 757) and King Wiglaf (ob. 840) were both interred there, as well as Wiglaf's grandson Wytstan, who was murdered in the year 849.

You may be puzzled as to where the bodies lay. The Anglo-Saxons probably were quite short, but not as short as the recesses which housed them. The explanation is that the mausoleum held not the bodies of the royal family but their bones. After death, the bodies were buried. Only when the flesh had decayed were the skull and long bones recovered and placed in caskets of wood or iron on shelves in one of the four recesses along the walls.



The crypt is a small chamber, about 16 feet square by 10 feet high, with nine almost square bays. It was built in stone originally, about two metres below the ground and one metre above, with a roof possibly of wood. Arched windows open to the north, east and south. It is thought that stairs led through what is now the west recess.



Before his death in 840 AD, Wiglaf is believed to have made changes to the simple original crypt to make it more ornate for his own burial. Those changes would have included adding the four central columns and the pilasters which support the vaulted ceiling. New round-headed windows appear. The columns were decorated later in the 9th century with fillets running spirally down from capital to base, a feature unique in Anglo-Saxon architecture. The spirals of adjacent columns run in opposite directions.

Following Wytstan's death in 849, his shrine became a place of pilgrimage. Passages were cut from the north-west and south-west corners of the crypt to manage the flow of pilgrims. Unlike the carefully dressed stone of the crypt itself, the walls of these stairways are roughly cut through stonework already in place. The immense labour of cutting these two passages would not have been undertaken without compelling reason and it tells us that a great number of people flocked to Repton. The original entry through the west wall was blocked.

Of the four recesses, only the one to the west is anything like its 9th century condition. It is a small chamber about five feet wide and three feet deep with its floor a step up from the level of the crypt. The recesses on the south, east and north have been much modified through the years. The doorway in the north recess was not part of the original design. It was inserted in the 14th century, by breaking up part of the main walls and the upper part of the flagstones. Perhaps in the 16th century, the semicircular windows of the crypt were blocked and replaced by rectangular windows whose sills cut away the upper parts of the original windows.

In later centuries, the crypt disappeared from view, as the stairs were floored over and the windows obscured by stables and sheds.

It seems illogical, but the concealment of the crypt has helped to preserve it. When it was again exposed to the elements, it began to suffer from damage by water and frost.
