



FRIENDS OF REPTON PARISH CHURCH

Charity No. 1162837

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Message from our President



Dear Friends

Welcome to our fourth newsletter. A lot has happened in the last two years as you will see below thanks to our supporters and the work of the Trustees.

It was a privilege to have a lecture from Prof Martin Biddle our Patron in October and we were so pleased it was well attended. It is intended that this should be the first of annual lectures on topics of local or national interest to Friends.

It was with some sadness that we heard of the retirement of our Chair of Trustees, the Revd Martin Flowerdew, as he was an 'ex officio' Trustee. He always encouraged the setting up of a Friends group to help care for St Wystan's church

and has been a great support to the Trustees.

We are therefore delighted that he has accepted our invitation to become an Honorary Patron of FRPC and intends to maintain his involvement with the charity.

Wishing you a Happy Christmas and a Peaceful New Year

Prof Mark Horton
President FRPC

A busy year

Following our launch event in October 2021 the trustees have continued with a full programme with three fundraising events during 2022. A concert by Silver Sax, the Derby based saxophone band, attracted nearly 100 people to a lively programme of popular pieces. A sunny Saturday afternoon in August again saw around 100 people enjoy a barbecue in a wonderful setting at Cokhay Farm with excellent food provided mainly by the Gould family. In October we were honoured to have Professor

Martin Biddle lecture on the significance of the crypt – full report below. The trustees are grateful for all the help from supporters with organising and hosting these events.

Trustees have also been involved with getting advice on fine tuning the new floodlighting to get the best effect with least environmental impact, and also considering new projects to support using funds accumulated from the proceeds of events. Hand held storyboards have been provided in church

describing particular features of the building (with more to come) and a new guide book is being prepared.

Details of the Friends' activities and finances in past years can be found in the trustees' annual reports on the Charity Commission website:
<https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/5065972/accounts-and-annual-returns>

Richard Finch

First Annual Lecture



On the 15th October, Professor Martin Biddle came back to Repton to deliver the first Annual Lecture for the Friends of Repton Parish Church. He has a long association with the village having lived here as a boy during the war and then, with his wife Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle, leading over a decade of archaeological digs around the church in the 1970s and 1980s. Preparing for this lecture had given him the opportunity to think through what was learned then and since, and he presented his latest thinking as a formal lecture followed by speaking to small groups in the crypt itself. Attendees were then able to join Professor Mark Horton outside explaining the structure of the exterior of the crypt and chancel above.

Prof Biddle pointed out that the eight flat pillars against the walls in the crypt were not bonded in and must therefore have been added later together with the four round spiralled pillars and corbelled ceiling. The quality of construction of the original structure and the fact that it is partially subterranean led him to conclude that it had started life as a mausoleum that must

have been for kings and he pointed out that we know of three of them – Merewahl, Æthald and Wiglaff. Archaeological evidence of a drain outside the north eastern corner led him to the conclusion that it was open to the sky, or at least partially so, with no access other than from above. Access would not have been necessary save for another interment. He was clear that the spiral design of the four ‘later’ central pillars was heavily influenced by pillars in Rome, citing Trajan’s column and other churches as examples. He noted that there was no evidence of a twisted rope effect on the spirals at Repton. He had concluded that the mausoleum was separate from the earliest church and in line with it to the east. He noted that there is another small mausoleum to the west, but not quite in line with the church and crypt, which had later been re-used as a charnel house and covered by a burial mound.

He mentioned the Viking warrior found in grave 511 outside the north east corner of the crypt and drew attention

to the cross he had been wearing suggesting that there may have already been Christian influences.

At some point, the early church had been extended eastwards until it covered the mausoleum which became the crypt and included the part of the building which is now the chancel. At some point the pair of stairs were cut through the existing masonry giving access from the church.

It was fascinating, a considerable feat of stamina and greatly appreciated by the more than 150 people who came. Professor Mark Horton had introduced Professor Biddle as a vastly experienced, highly respected and most knowledgeable archaeologist, noting his full titles included CBE, MA, FBA and FSA. As an Emeritus Fellow of Hertford College, Oxford and Honorary Fellow of Pembroke College Cambridge and archaeological consultant to several cathedrals, we are very grateful to have him as a Patron of the Friends of Repton Parish Church.

Andy Austen



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Rediscovering and restoring the crypt

Part 1

Professor Biddle's lecture in October reminded us of the origins of the crypt and how it came to take on its current appearance. It's interesting to look at how its significance has been understood at different times over the last 200 years since its rediscovery in 1779.

Sometime during the medieval period the entrances were blocked off, the ground level outside was raised and its existence forgotten.

In 1779 a workman digging for an interment in the floor of the chancel above fell through in to the crypt below.

Generally descriptions of Repton church around this time mention the spire as its most striking feature. The antiquarian Stebbing Shaw writing in 1790 simply mentions almost in passing "*an ancient crypt lately discovered*". Twenty years later Revd D P Davies writing in 1811 his New historical and descriptive view of Derbyshire makes it clear that the entrances from the church on the north and south sides were known :

"beneath the chancel is an ancient crypt discovered of late years ... with passages at each corner of the west end leading in to the church." By the 1840s the crypt was being described in much the same terms that we use today. Thomas Bateman's Vestiges of the antiquities of Derbyshire 1841 says *"the crypt however still remains one of the most important examples of Saxon architecture extant in England"*, and Robert Bigsby's Historical and topographical description of Repton 1854 in its chapter on the Church includes a detailed discussion of the dating and structure of the crypt.



Illustration from this work

The question then arose as to how the crypt might be shown off or used as some kind of chapel. The restoration of 1885-6 left the crypt untouched apart from cleaning out – the faculty seeking permission for the work simply says *"the crypt to be kept exactly as it is at present with the exception of clearing out the soil that has accumulated on the floor ..."*.

It was in 1912 that a faculty was sought to *"repair the ancient crypt to erect therein an altar of stone or wood with cross and candlesticks and other ornaments or furniture, or furniture, ie flower vases and seatings. To be lit with electric light.* In the event, as a result by intervention from Sir Vancey Harpur Crewe, Derbyshire Archaeological Society and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings only basic repair work was done. A letter in the SPAB archive from Mr Currey, the Derby architect, confirms this saying *"the work in progress at Repton Crypt is being carried out by the lay rector [Sir Vauncey Harpur Crewe] ... very little is being done, the crack in one of the columns and one or two open joints in the walling have been carefully pointed ... a new oak door is being put in place ... and glazing is to be made for the windows in movable frames which can be fixed in winter to keep out the driving rains..."*.

This tension between simple repair and conservation and the desire to furnish the crypt continued for the next 100 years and the story of the crypt in the 20th century will be continued in a future newsletter.

Richard Finch

Events in 2023

These include a Spring concert, a summer picnic with guided tour of the Anchor Caves at Foremark, and an Autumn lecture related to this. Details will be sent by email and publicised on the website

<https://www.friendsofreptonparishchurch.co.uk>