



## FRIENDS OF REPTON PARISH CHURCH

Charity No. 1162837

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### Welcome to the December 2023 Newsletter

In this issue you will find

- Trustee news
- a report of the Anchor Church conducted tour and visit to St Saviour's Church
- 'Plaster or Bare Walls?' from the Church Archives
- planned use of funds
- dates for your diary.

We hope you find something of interest to you.

### Trustee News

**John Perks** had a vision for setting up a Friends organization to support the care and upkeep of St Wystan's Church with the involvement of the local community. He was a founder Trustee of Friends of Repton Parish Church (FRPC) and worked tirelessly to set up the constitution and obtain charity status. He has continued to support its work but decided to step down as a Trustee in July after his third term of office. In recognition of his unfailing support he was invited to become an honorary patron which he has been happy to accept.

**Richard Finch** having been acting Chair since the retirement of Rev Martin Flowerdew has been elected Chair by the Trustees who are delighted he has accepted the position.

### Foremark and Anchor Churches visit



On Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> July, despite the weather, over 40 people joined the guided tour of Anchor Church and St Saviour's Church, Foremark.



Having met in Foremark Church, Richard Finch gave an excellent talk on the history of the church. He outlined the history from when the existing church was built in 1662 by Sir Francis Burdett.

Following Richard's talk and several interesting questions, the group then walked to Anchor Church where Professor Edmund Simons gave an entertaining talk on their history reminding us that they have been called 'Anchor Church' since at least the 17th century and the church has long

been known locally as the former dwelling of a hermit. It has had a varied history, Sir Robert Burdett having it fitted out so that he could dine there and in the 1940s it was a favourite resort for gypsy parties.



Our thanks go to Ed Simons and all who came to support the event.

Mel Thomas

### Annual Lecture

The visit to Anchor Church was to have been followed up with a lecture by Professor Ed Simons on Anchor Church in the context of other rock cut buildings. But the floods in October meant this unfortunately had to be cancelled. We apologize for any inconvenience, particularly to those who were intending to come from a distance.

## FROM THE ARCHIVES Plaster or bare walls?

Nearly all medieval churches had their inside walls whitened with limewash or plaster. This covered roughly finished stone work, helped to lighten dark interiors and provided a background for wall paintings and other decoration. The original surface finish was fairly rough giving a textured surface as wooden floats were used to finish the plaster. However it was often the case that plaster was renewed during the 18<sup>th</sup> century when a metal float would have been used producing a smoother almost glossy finish.

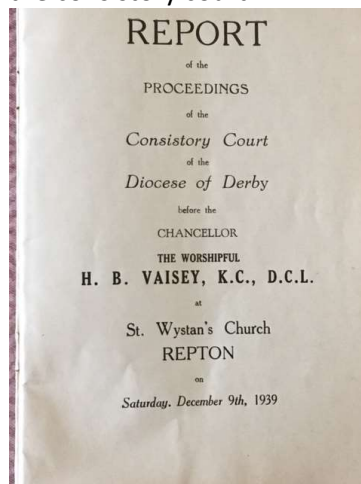
When it came to restoration work from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards this would be referred to as "modern plaster" and would generally be stripped off as not being authentically original and also from a desire to expose the historic structure.

This was broadly what took place in St Wystan's from the time of the 1885-6 restoration. The faculty for this work included "to chip off old plaster on walls."

This seems to have referred to the north and south walls of the nave. Subsequently in 1913 plaster was stripped off the east wall of the nave above the chancel arch. An article in The Athenaeum magazine explains this and the result in terms of exposing the original stone work: "The smooth surface of modern plaster immediately around and above the pointed chancel arch has been stripped off, thereby revealing the interesting fact that the hood-mould of this arch was cut away in the fifteenth century, to make room for the adjustment of a great rood-screen and loft. The much elevated rood-loft doorway, probably approached by a wooden stairway from the chantry chapel, has likewise been opened. But the most interesting

result of the removal of this modern plaster is to expose more of the Anglo-Saxon masonry, showing a former opening of at least 6 ft. in width, flanked on each side by long-and-short work, which must have opened into an upper chamber of the tenth-century chancel." This left the interior to be dominated by the bare east wall that we see today and led Simon Jenkins in his England's thousand best churches to say that "the nave east wall looks like the cliff face of a stone quarry." These quotations sum up the argument as to whether the interior walls of churches such as St Wystan's should be plastered as supposedly they were originally or left austere to expose the detail of the historic stonework.

In 1939 the parish sought permission to strip plaster from the chancel walls. We have a full account of the proceedings of the consistory court.



The vicar, Revd Alfred Fletcher, argued strongly that removal would expose "the great interest of the Saxon masonry ... the ingenious way in which stones of widely varying sizes and shapes are fitted together to form a wall which has withstood the storms of a thousand years ... there are not many 10<sup>th</sup> century walls left; we are not seeking to destroy this one, but to reveal it so that all may see it." This was countered by the Revd R F Borough on

behalf of the Diocesan Advisory Committee who wished the walls to remain plastered as he believed they were originally: "in medieval times this wall was plastered, and there is no doubt that in Saxon times also they were plastered, and I do not believe that when the Church was constructed the worshippers ever saw that stonework." In the event the Diocesan Chancellor ruled in favour of removal on the basis that the parish supported the vicar.

Again in 1949 the church architect summed up the rationale for removing plaster when his advice was sought on dealing with a small area of remaining plaster in the Fynderne Chapel: "although as a general principle the rubble walls of medieval churches should be plastered I feel that this case is an exception. The masonry of the walls is of particular interest and contains much of the evidence of the building history. In these circumstances I recommend that the small amount of plaster remaining in the transept should be removed".

So we have in the surviving parish records the story of how, in common with many other historic parish churches, St Wystan's has been gradually transformed from white plastered interior walls to the bare stone work that we have today.

Richard Finch



## PLANNED USE OF FUNDS

### Chancel stonework repairs

The 2023 Quinquennial Inspection of St Wystan's Church identified the need for stonework repairs at the top of the north east corner of the Saxon Chancel and the foundation stones at the base.

Also this year a number of pieces of wood from the interior timber roof of the nave had fallen and it was decided that it needed to be inspected at close quarters. Our Architect, Mark Parsons, carried out an inspection from a cherry picker and declared the roof safe and in good condition, the timber having fallen from isolated surface repairs and suggested a local earth tremor could have been the cause.



While on site Mark took the opportunity to inspect the exterior stonework of the chancel at close quarters and advised a course of action which includes a more detailed inspection with a conservation stone mason, followed by the preparation of a specification so that tenders for the work can be sought.

The total cost is likely to be in the region of £13,000. The FRPC Trustees have pledged a donation of £5,000 towards the cost of the building contract.

## Replacement of dying hawthorn tree



Earlier this year an inspection of all the trees in the churchyard (which are all covered by a Tree Preservation Order) was carried out by a specialist consultant and the hawthorn tree to the west of the lychgate was identified as dying. The recommendation was to fell it and planning permission has been granted subject to a replacement tree being planted in the first planting season after the tree is felled.

The Trustees of FRPC have offered to pay for the replacement tree once the species has been agreed by the Local Planning Authority.

## PROGRAMME FOR 2024

**Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2024**

7.30 pm St Wystan's Church

### Derventio Brass

A concert of varied brass music by a well respected local band

**Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> August**

### Summer Barbecue

We are once again invited to Cokhay Farm for a barbecue lunch and social gathering

**October**

To be arranged

### Annual Lecture

Full details of all these events to follow on our website and by email

**We wish you a very happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year**

**from the Trustees of FRPC**

