



FRIENDS OF REPTON PARISH CHURCH

Charity No. 1162837

NEWSLETTER NO 7 SUMMER 2024



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Welcome to the Summer 2024 Newsletter

In this issue you will find

- Trustee news
- A message from Rev Steve Short
- The other Anchor Church
- Planned use of funds
- Dates for your diary.

We hope you find something of interest to you.

Trustee News

At a meeting of Trustees on 2nd May we were pleased to welcome Revd Steve Short, newly appointed vicar of the Benefice of Foremark, with Repton and Newton Solney and of Willington as an ex-officio Trustee. We also welcomed Stephen Hardwick who was appointed as Trustee and Treasurer.

Mel Thomas resigned as a Trustee in May and he was thanked for his service representing the local community. We are looking for someone with an interest in supporting the future of the church building to become a Trustee. If anyone is interested in taking on this role or knows anyone who might be suitable then please contact the Secretary for further information.

Forthcoming Events



Please join us for this social event in a lovely location if you can. If wet the event will take place undercover.

These events will help raise further funds for conserving, repairing and improving St Wystan's church and churchyard for future generations.

Already pledged:
£5,000 for repairs to Chancel Stonework to be carried out this year
£2,000 for a new lawnmower which will cope with longer and wet grass to make the job of our loyal volunteers who mow the churchyard easier

Annual Lecture

Saturday 2nd November 2024
2 pm

St Wystan's Church, Repton

Professor Mark Horton

Fifty years of Early Medieval
Archaeology at Repton
1974-2023.

Between the first season of work undertaken in 1974 on the south side of St Wystan's Church, to the completion of the work in the vicarage garden on 2023, many new discoveries have been made at Repton to help us understand the early medieval England, and the relationship between the Saxon Mercians and Viking invaders and settlers. Professor Mark Horton was present as a student in 1973, and latterly resumed the investigations, with Dr Cat Jarman from 2016 in the Vicarage Garden. In a personal talk Mark will prove a perspective on these many discoveries, and how our thinking about early medieval England has evolved over this half century, and the place that Repton has played in this.

The lecture will be followed by a tour of sites in Repton School not normally open to the public

Tickets £12, students £5,
children under 12 free
Include light refreshments

Please contact Andy on
07977 440992
or email frpc.873ad@gmail.com

Message from Revd Steve Short

Cirencester Parish Church, Tewkesbury Abbey, Melbourne Parish Church and now the wonderful St Wystan's Repton – I have been quite blessed with church buildings throughout my ministry as youth worker and priest!

Like many, I have formative and early memories of churches and cathedrals (I am a third-generation priest in my family) particularly the majestic interior and exterior of Peterborough Cathedral which continues to take my breath away.

In my early days as an undergraduate, I was fortunate in having an expert on sacred architecture for a lecturer. Dr Malcolm Wren (I think) was, more specifically, an authority on the supreme example of gothic architecture that is Chartres Cathedral not far from Paris. My cohort revelled in being introduced to the concept of 'sacred geometry' and the theology of architecture. These sacred stones built to glorify the Maker of mountains and microbes, yes, but also designed to speak to the pilgrim of faith or none; to take those who cross the threshold on a journey that can encompass mind body and spirit.

Cirencester, Melbourne and Tewkesbury churches and abbey are all of a similar age – almost exactly 900 years old give or take a year or two. To

come, then, to Repton which predates them all by around 400 years is quite humbling.

As a parish priest and incumbent, you receive the 'cure of souls' which places a responsibility upon the priest for the spiritual and pastoral welfare of all those within your parishes and benefice. As if that wasn't enough, you can also be inducted or collated by the archdeacon on behalf of the bishop *'into the real, actual and corporal possession of the church(es) of xxx.'*

It is quite an undertaking! Which is why I am particularly grateful to my colleagues in the worshipping community and the Friends of Repton Parish Church for their sharing in the care of this ancient house of prayer.

No ancient building ever arrives in the way that we encounter them as twenty first century visitors, or very rarely so. Churches are almost constantly changing as they adapt to the challenges (and opportunities) of each historical epoch. As clergy and people together, we are only ever custodians of these vitally important buildings that are always greater than the sum of their considerable parts.

I look forward eagerly to continuing to see church building and community thrive both now and into the future; of making memories and transforming lives as we let the ancient stones speak for themselves, enabling visitors to become *pilgrims*.

*How awesome is this place!
This is none other than the
house of God, and this is the
gate of heaven."
Genesis 28.17*

Concert by Derventio Brass, Voices and Derby City Singers

Over 100 people enjoyed this varied and high quality concert with a good variety of brass repertoire from classical to Jazz contrasted with choral pieces. Our thanks go to all the performers for providing such an entertaining evening. Wine, soft drinks and delicious finger food were served in the interval. Over £800 was raised for funds.



Plans for 2025 Programme

Plans are in progress for an evening of music of the Beatles in April.

In May or June it is hoped to arrange a coach trip to Deerhurst (with its very special Saxon Church) and Tewkesbury Abbey.

Our third annual lecture will take place at the end of October.

The Other Anchor Church....

There has been much interest recently in the Anchor Church caves at Ingleby but the name also appears in Anchor Church Field in Crowland near Peterborough. Long thought to be the location of the hermitage of St. Guthlac, the sites are sixty miles apart and it is reasonable to assume that the use of the names is coincidental. However, there are real connections between Repton and Crowland (originally Croyland).

A romantic version of the story of Guthlac has him setting off from Repton's monastery in a boat saying that wherever it fetched up, there he would have a hermitage where he would live an isolated, prayerful life.

In fact it was very different. Most information comes from Felix's Life of Guthlac¹ written about 30 years after Guthlac's death but there are other sources including a very recent archaeological paper that has added a lot of contextual evidence².

Guthlac was a well brought up son of a wealthy, noble family but, aged 15 (c 689AD), his nature changed. With two others he caused misery through violent plunder and formed a war band which probably also fought as mercenaries for King Æthelred. However, after 9 years of this he was admonished by God and he insisted the band returned a third of what they had taken. Soon after (about 698 and aged 24) he was "suddenly inspired with divine awe" and realised that for many "kings of yore", a miserable death was the end of a wretched and sinful life - rendering their riches meaningless. He repented and entered the Benedictine monastery at Hrypadun (Repton).

Over two years under Abbess Ælfthrytha he "learned his psalms and canticles and hymns and prayers after ecclesiastical order". He was not popular as he refused to drink alcohol and this irritated his brother monks. Learning about earlier hermits and anchorites he longed for a place in the wilderness. Guthlac would have been aware of the fens as immense and lonely marshes, bogs, islands, rivers and streams and from the recent archaeological dig it is now clear that the area had had immense religious significance for several thousand years and so was well understood in that context.

Given ecclesiastical permission, he travelled by the straightest route to the fens - probably to the monastery of Medeshamstede (modern Peterborough) founded by Repton centred King Peada about 655. There he met Tatwine, a local man, who knew of an "island especially obscure, which oftentimes many men had attempted to inhabit, but no man could do it on account of manifold horrors and fears and the loneliness of the wide wilderness". They embarked on a boat and Tatwine guided them to Crowland.

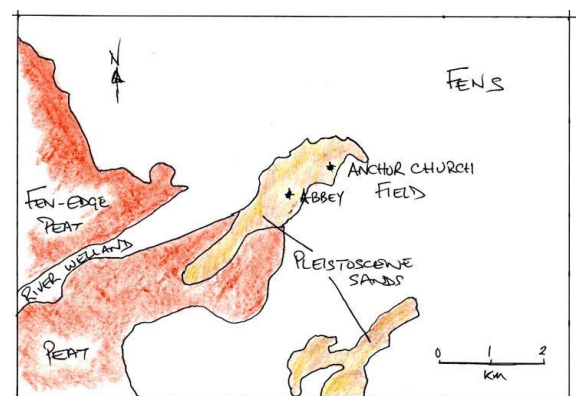
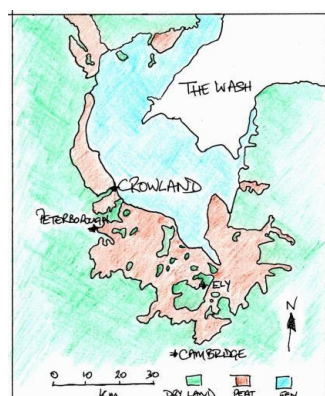
His arrival was on St Bartholomew's Day and after staying there a few days, Guthlac returned to Repton for a couple of months and then set off back to Crowland with two servants

and materials for shelter. They found a great mound of earth that was a robbed out burial mound and created his hermitage there.

He observed the rituals of the Benedictine order, but refused wool or linen clothing, wearing only skins. He ate nothing except barley bread and water, and that only after sunset.

Early on, he was plagued with despair about his undertaking to dwell alone in the wilderness, but he remembered his former sins and wickednesses, and when, after 3 days and in broad daylight, St. Bartholomew appeared before him, he "was filled with spiritual joy" and his resolve was strengthened.

Guthlac suffered many attacks from demons (including an attempt to starve him) and night time attacks by "great hosts of the accursed spirits" - "in countenance horrible, and they had great heads and, a long neck, and lean visage: they were filthy and squalid in their beards: and they had rough ears, and distorted face, and fierce eyes, and foul mouths; and their teeth were like horses' tusks; and their throats were filled with flame, and they were grating in their voice ... [much more] ... and it seemed to him that all between heaven and earth resounded with their dreadful cries" On another occasion, they inundated his shelter and bound him and threw him into the black fen and sank



Based on Figs 1 and 2 in the Archaeology Report

him in the muddy water. Then they dragged him through thickets and “*all his body was torn*”. The torment went on with the devils challenging him to leave and on his refusal an immense hoard of cursed spirits came toward him and brought him to hell’s door. He saw the foulness of the smoke and the burning flames and the way they tormented the souls of unrighteous men and he was terrified. The devils threatened to throw him into the torments of the abyss if he did not abandon his calling. When he rejected them they moved to thrust him into hell, but the appearance of St. Bartholomew in holy splendour caused them to hide. Bartholomew commanded them to gently carry Guthlac back to his shelter and in mid-air they were accompanied by a troop of holy spirits. Bartholomew provided Guthlac with a scourge with which to defend himself. There were further attacks of different sorts,



Matthew rescuing Guthlac from the mouth of Hell. Note the scourge

but now Guthlac was better able to deal with them.

It clearly was not so isolated an existence as might have been assumed. His presence was well known and visitors sought him out for healing, prophecy and advice. This included a young

Æthalbald who had a claim to the kingdom of Mercia but had been exiled and was being hunted by the king - Coelred. He was sheltered by Guthlac but fretted as to whether he would become king. Guthlac prayed to God on his behalf and was able to assure him that he would be king and without bloodshed. In the event, Coelred is recorded as having died at a banquet in 716 in a frenzy, gibbering with demons and cursing the priests of God and Æthalbald replaced him. As king, Æthalbald was Repton centred (the last such) and in 757 buried in the Crypt at Repton. He had promised that if Guthlac’s prophecy was fulfilled, he would build him a monastery at Crowland. And so he did.

In 715, after 15 years in his hermitage, Guthlac was at his prayers when he was attacked by a sudden illness and started to prepare himself for his entry into the heavenly kingdom. On hearing of his illness, the abbess at Repton sent a shroud and lead for his coffin. He was ill for 7 days and on the 8th “*brought to the utmost extremity*” and he died.

There is a tradition that Anchor Church Field just north east of the present Abbey ruins was the site of Guthlac’s hermitage and aerial photography and geophysical surveys in 2002 demonstrated remains. With this and the steady attrition of the site by farming, Duncan Wright and Hugh Willmott undertook a two year archaeological project in 2021 and 2022 which resulted in a (stunning) paper published this year.²

This found clear evidence of a late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age henge which may have had a circle of timber posts inserted and a number of Burial Barrows – a Bronze Age ritual complex. After the Bronze Age, the henge

seems to have been abandoned but there is evidence of use in Roman and Early Medieval (Anglo-Saxon) periods with finds of 7th-9th century ceramic sherds and glass from drinking vessels at Guthlac’s time - with use right through to post medieval times.

Antiquarian William Stukeley drew, in 1776, a sketch of a mound in Anchor Church Field with a small building on it and in spite of much damage in the 1880s, a mound was discernible into the 1950s but ploughed out in the last 60 years. Archaeological evidence is clear that there have been several phases of building on the spot probably as later generations encouraged the cult of St Guthlac with shrines and chapels.

Although there can be no absolute evidence that this is the site of Guthlac’s Hermitage, it is almost certainly the case. The appearances of devils and evil spirits were clearly metaphysical and may have been induced by Marsh Fever (probably Malaria) or by Ergot poisoning - a fungus that can infect Barley. Nevertheless, a real spiritual tussle.

References:

- 1) The Anglo Saxon version of the life of Guthlac - Felix before 749.
https://books.google.com/book/about/The_Anglo_Saxon_version_of_the_life_of_s.html?id=fjUEAAAAQAAJ
- 2) Sacred Landscapes and Deep Time Mobility, Memory and Monasticism on Crowland - Wright and Willmott 2024
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00934690.2024.2332853> (paste into your browser)