



Repton Village History Group Newsletter

Spring 2024



<https://reptonvillage.org.uk/repton-village-history-group/>

Programme of meetings:

The next meeting is on May 21st and it is our AGM. As usual, at 7.00pm in the URC School Room. Shelagh Wain will give a talk on Medieval Food and Dining.

Bench Marks: Tim has been hunting for bench marks locally.



When, in 2016, Henry Webber was setting up the GPS satellite equipment for the planned archaeological dig in the Vicarage Garden, he was looking for a benchmark to set his instrumentation to a known height. They hunted for one on the wall near the telephone box at The Cross. In fact it couldn't be found so they used the one on the small bridge over the Old Trent Water on the causeway opposite the school gym. This gave him a means of setting his instrumentation to a known height which can be related to mean sea-level at Newlyn in Cornwall. Although mean sea levels are rising, they still enable the height of any feature to be established relative to any others of interest.

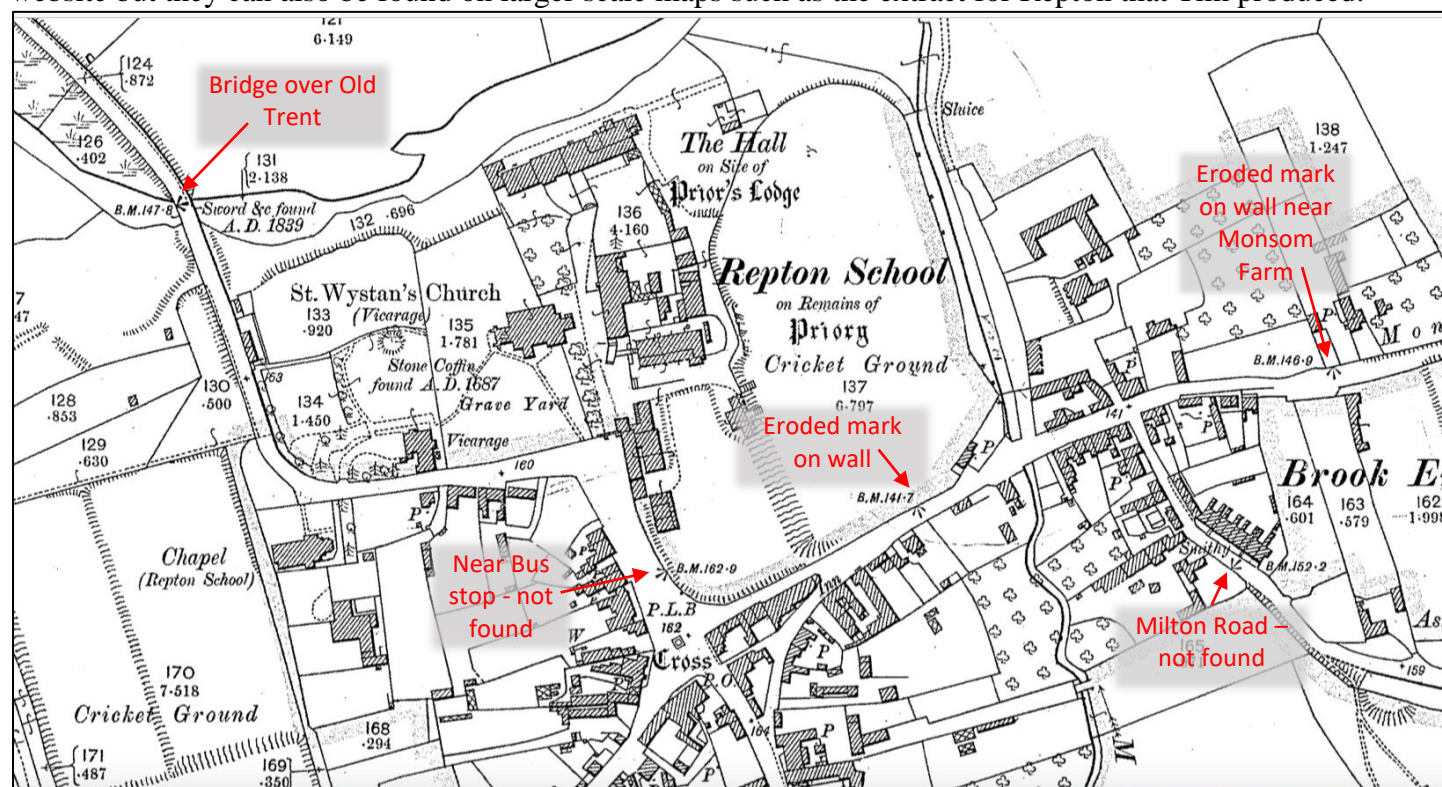
Benchmarks are usually cut into a solid feature such as a wall or boundary or mile stone. The idea is that a bench level can be positioned against the horizontal line so measurements of height of other locations can be made using dumpy levels or theodolites. If the surface is not level, then the line is sometimes replaced by a small hollow dot or a stud onto which the measuring staff could be placed.



The mark on the Old Trent bridge.

They were first used as early as 1831 and a systematic benchmark network was established from 1840 and they significantly predated Trig Points. The last traditionally shaped one was cut in 1993 on a mile post in Loughton but have now been replaced by more advanced technology. No longer maintained or replaced, their numbers are dropping due to erosion or building work, but there are still some 5,000 nationally.

There are registers of benchmarks with location and height that can be downloaded from the Ordnance Survey website but they can also be found on larger scale maps such as the extract for Repton that Tim produced:



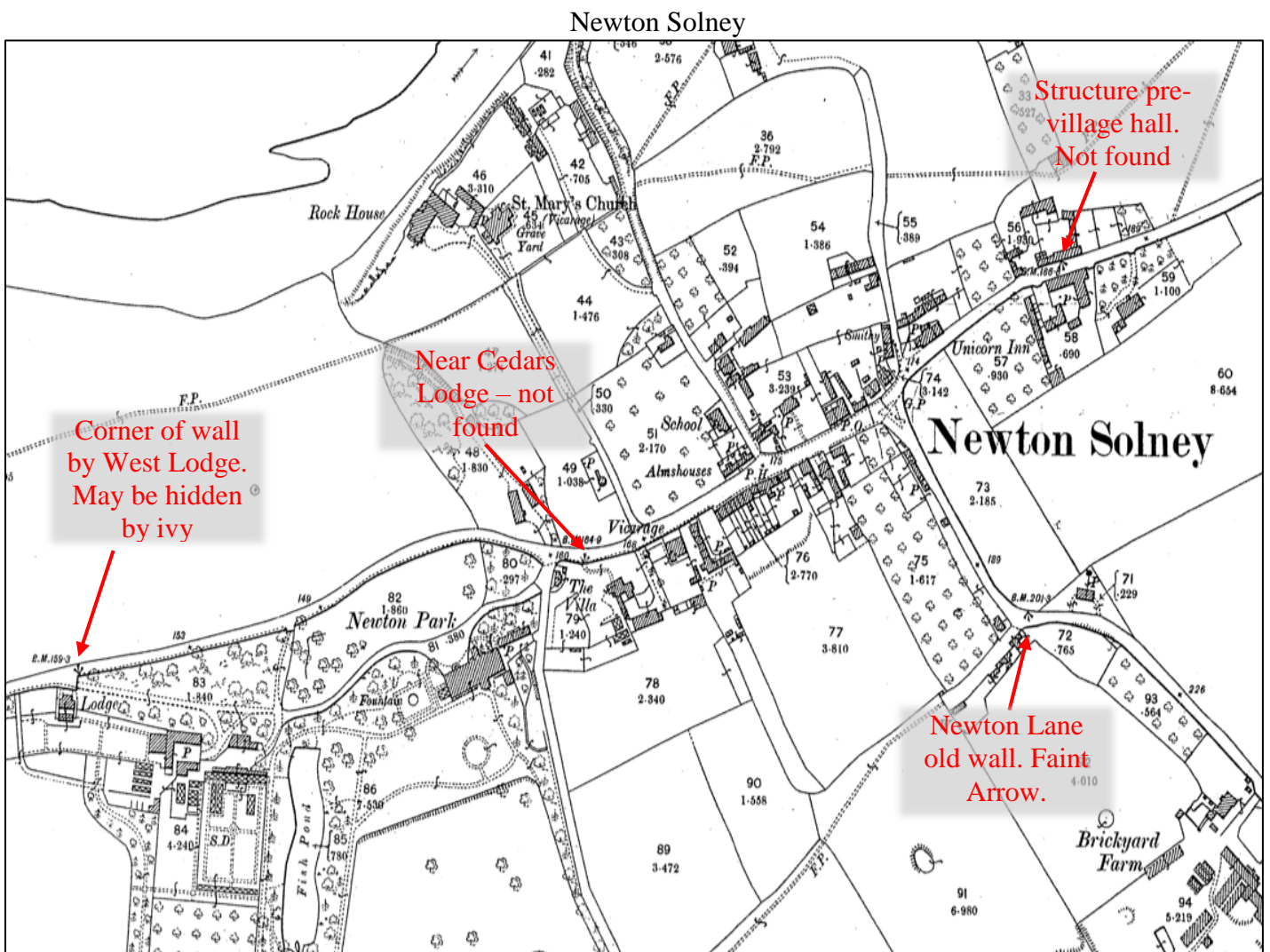
And there were two more in Repton – one on the eastern side of Main St by the Smithy (now gone and replaced by Samaras) and another on the west side of High Street where the Pastures is now.



Monsom Lane, Repton

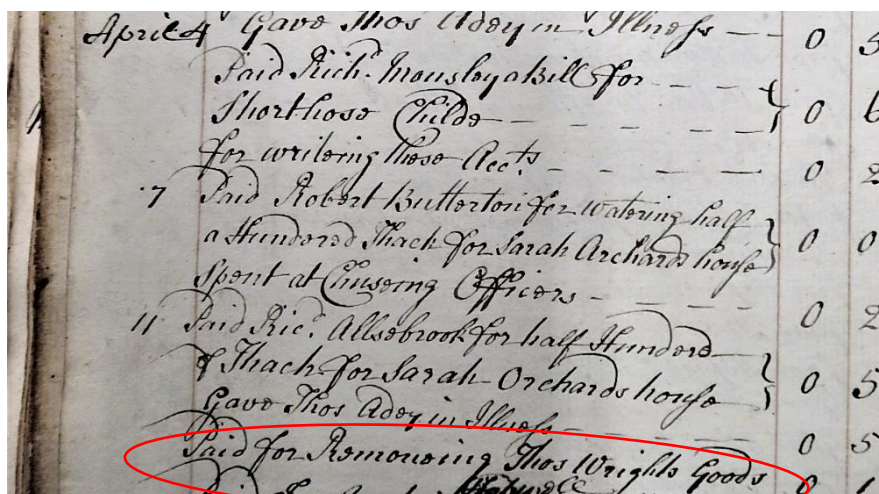
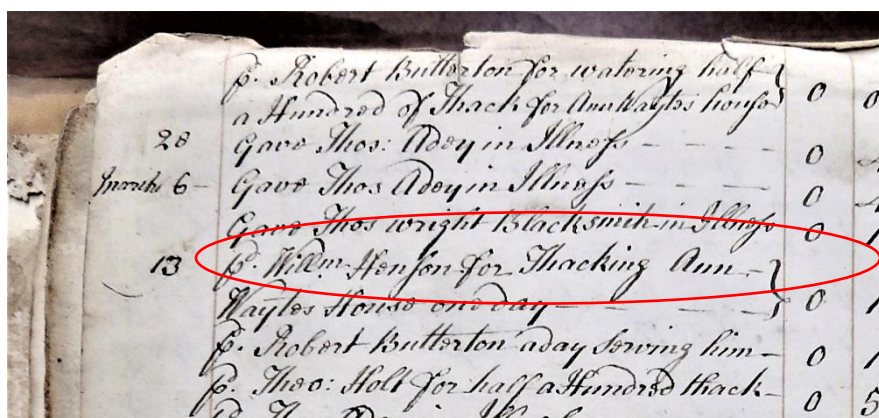


Newton Lane faint mark.



Tim's research found more in Willington and a hunt on the 1901 maps revealed 3 bench marks in Milton and 3 on or close to the road at Foremark. Whether they can be found is questionable.

Helping with enquiries: The number of family history enquiries has dropped off dramatically but we recently had an enquiry about a blacksmith - Thomas Wright - who was born in Repton in 1698 and who, it is thought,



married an Anne. He had an apprentice named William Stratton. Paul, the enquirer, had picked this up from a publically published family tree (always to be treated with great caution).

The parish registers that we have ready access to, run from 1578 to 1670 so he is too late for them but there are plenty of Wrights registered for births, marriages and deaths in that period.

Charles checked his magnificent database and found references to Thomas. He did marry an Ann in 1723 and they a had a son John - not surprisingly, also a blacksmith.

Another entry is from the Overseers of the Poor accounts when Thomas was 69. In March 1767, he was given a shilling (in illness) and there is another entry on 11th April "paid for remaining Thos Wrights goods 1 shilling". Charles notes that he died a year or so later.

It seems that Thomas's father came to Repton from Stapenhill in 1676.

Paul is now in touch with Charles and with a bit of luck we will have a more complete story next time.

The Repton Dig: Although, over the years, there have been many archaeological digs in Repton, this phrase always relates to the 12 or more seasons of digs in Repton in the 1970s and 80s led by Martin B (Professor Martin Biddle) and his wife Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle. Almost all the finds are in Derby Museum and members of the history group volunteered a few years pre-Covid to complete the listing of the small finds.

Late in 2022, there was a great excitement amongst those of us with a keen interest in Repton's early history. The message had come through from Spencer and Rachel at Derby Museum to say that 54 document crates had arrived from Oxford University bearing the Repton contents of Professor Biddle's office. The museum team unpacked the boxes and relocated them onto bookshelves in the old Library. They contained over 700 folders of documents plus the trench notebooks, layer records, the concordance, year books, card indexes, slides, and over 500 A0 drawings of sections and plans ... and more. This material was supplemented shortly after by documents and artefacts held by Dr Cat Jarman and it means that not only does the museum hold the artefacts from the dig, but also the supporting documentation.

It was suggested that the history group might be able to make a listing of what is there and five group members set about working our way through everything and listing the contents – Ian, Tim, Andy, Margaret and Richard Finch,. We were joined by two relative youngsters (Fiona and Amrita) who were planning careers in librarianship/archiving who proved a great help. As well as core dig material, and subsequent analysis, there is much background research into related topics. There is so much of great interest there which will be available to read in due course.

The dig had been making use of emerging digital technologies and that posed a challenge to us as some data was stored on twenty one 5.25" floppy discs and even more of the later 3.5" discs. We had portable drives that would open the latter - although the files were not initially readable. A bit of work gave us access to many files, but we will need to hunt down a copy of dBase to access some items. The 5.25" floppy discs were more of a challenge but Fiona took them to the new (and excellent) Derby Computer Museum in Irongate and they were able to copy the files for us. Again with a bit of work we accessed most of them.

It is hoped that in due course, all the material might be made more widely accessible and possibly pulled together to provide a comprehensive story. Martin B has already written a number of papers on the Viking period and on the stone work, but there may be more to tell on the earlier Anglo Saxon times.

Predecessor to the “Red House”:

[This house is the predecessor to the red brick house opposite the Vicarage. It burned down when the thatch was ignited by a spark from a passing traction engine.]

Charles Proud writes:

I have recently been scouring national photographic archives for early photos of Repton. So far I haven't discovered a great deal but I can share with you a couple I have found. The National Photographic Record & Survey was an attempt at the end of the 19th Century to preserve a photographic record of the UK at a time of great change by encouraging local photographers to contribute images. The resulting photographs are online on the V&A website and although two of the three Repton images, of St Wystans and the Crypt, are similar to ones we have all seen the one below from 1898 is both of excellent quality and is also an early record of important Repton buildings, some still with us, some sadly not. The second photograph showing some wonderful beehives in the back garden of the same house opposite the Vicarage is by Richard Keene of Derby and is from a collection at Lambeth Palace Library and probably dates from the 1880's.

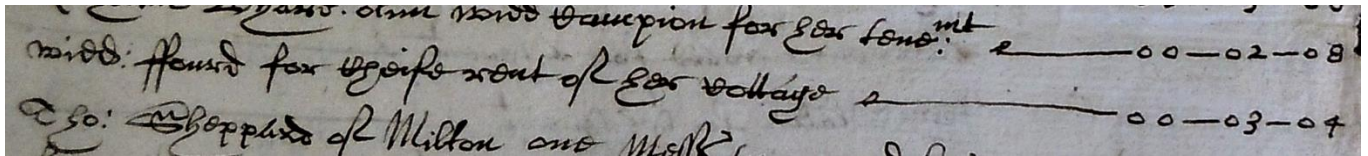


Acton Cottage & Independent Chapel. (again by Charles)

[Acton Cottage is next but one to the southern corner of High St and The Pastures]

There is currently considerable debate over the ground rents payable by householders in leasehold properties but people are much less familiar with chief rents which are payable by freeholders to a third party, in this case to the Harpur family as Lords of the Manor of Repton. For the local historian, and for the freeholder, chief rents have the considerable advantage of being fixed in monetary terms.

The story begins with Widow Fourd paying 3s 4d for the 'chief rent of her cottage' in 1625 and she was still paying the same in 1655.



Handwritten rental record from 1625 and 1655. The text is written in cursive and includes the following entries:

- 1625. Widow Fourd for chief rent of her cottage 3s 4d
- 1655. Sheppard of Milton one Mark

There is then a gap in the extant rentals but the 1681 rental notes 'Job Durham's widow, now Arthur Taylor' paying the 3s 4d. Arthur Taylor paid the 3s 4d until 1713 when Henry Waite took over until his death in 1743. John Carter paid 3s 4d from 1747 until 1811 when John Redgate took over, paying from 1811 until his death in 1836. The last record we have is the executors of his son, another John Redgate, paying the 3s 4d in 1853.

[unchanged in 228 years]

The above gives us a possible framework of owners & tenants and we are lucky to have further documentary evidence to provide further information on both what later became Acton Cottage and the chapel and burial ground at the end of its garden. A deed at Matlock (D2375/D/D/36/2/26) records a purchase by Henry Weate from William & Nathaniel Charnell of Durham's Cottage & adjoining croft for £20. A further Matlock document (D4514/13/1-25) notes that Elizabeth Carter, daughter in law & heir of the above Henry Wait, sold Durham's Cottage, then occupied by John Carter, blacksmith, to her son Thomas Carter in 1762. The same document notes that in 1805 Thomas Carter sold the cottage to John Redgate of Repton, hairdresser.

After John Redgate, the son, died in 1849 his widow Hannah sold the cottage & land to the rear to James Smith of Weeping Cross, Staffs although Hannah was still living there in 1851. The cottage was sold to Repton School after the death of Sarah Ann Smith in 1882 along with the house next door which had been used by the School as a sanatorium since 1866.

Identifying the occupants in the second half of the 19th Century requires further work but the cottage was bought by Hugh Jarman for £350 in 1902 and he built the house we now see in 1903, naming the new house after his family farm in Cheshire. He died in 1914 with the house being leased to Frank Wild until at least 1921.

Turning now to the chapel. The earlier cottage is clearly marked on the 1762 Open Fields Map (plot 119) with the Good Field strips immediately behind and by the 1829 Map, the cottage is unchanged (plot 539) but a small chapel has appeared to the west (refs 539 & 540), recorded in 1830 as owned by the 'Trustees of Independent Chapel'.



1762 map

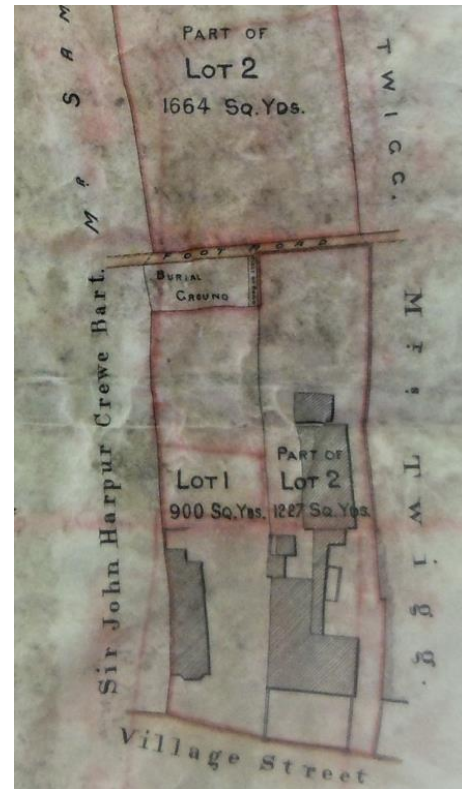


1829 map

An 1801 trust deed in the National Archives (C54,7605; part of the long roll in the photo!) records the purchase of the newly constructed chapel from George Measham by the Trustees of the Independent Chapel; the building to be maintained as chapel & burial ground for 'Independents'. The Trustees were:

Rev John Smith of Melbourne; Rev Richard Alliot of Nottingham; John & William Brown of Milton, farmers; Thomas Whieldon, cooper; Benjamin Ward, wheelwright; Thomas Smedley, cordwainer; Samuel Vickers, labourer; all Repton; Edward Ward, needlemaker; John Hill, baker; both Derby; Stephen Leedham of Melbourne, farmer; William Cartlidge of Kings Newton, farmer; Thomas Saddington of the Minories, London, haberdasher; Thomas Wayte of Burton on Trent, printer & Joseph Bullock of Castle Donnington, cordwainer.

The chapel was in use until the Pinfold Lane Chapel was built in the 1830s (details of this in a further trust deed of 1837, C54,11784). The 1882 plan below shows the burial ground still there but the building has gone.



Primitive Methodists and Fundamental Baptists. In the 1851 Religious Census there is reference to 4 churches in Repton – the Parish Church, the Wesleyan Methodist (Well Lane), the Independent or Congregational Chapel (Pinfold Lane) and the Primitive Methodists.

Charles and Ivor have been pondering on the location of the latter. One possibility is that it used the Acton Cottage Independent Chapel after the original worshipers had moved to Pinfold Lane. But the dates don't quite work as (according to the 1851 religious census) the Independent Chapel in Pinfold Lane was erected in 1837 and the Primitive Methodist's building dates to 1833. The Acton Cottage chapel was built in about 1801 (see Charles' piece on Acton Cottage above).

In addition, some years ago, Ivor came across a reference to a Seventh Day Baptist chapel in Morley's Yard (opposite Broomhills Lane) from 1831 or 1832. The only reference we have found to Baptists in Repton is that the birth of one of the Morley children was registered in the Ticknall General Baptist chapel in March 1824. Seventh day Baptists hold Saturday as their holy day/day of rest.

Could it be that this Baptist Chapel was actually a Primitive Methodists Chapel? The dates work quite well.

Those four Northumbrian Priests: One of Repton's major claims to fame is that it was here in 653CE that Peada (a son of pagan Mercian King Penda) returned from Northumbria with his new wife and 4 missionary priests – Cedd (brother of Chad), Diuma, Betti and Adda.

As one of pagan King Penda's sons, he was to marry the daughter of King Oswiu in Northumbria but had to take Christian instruction. A sister had already married into Oswiu's family and it was her husband that instructed him. In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* Bede says that it was a genuine conversion. He was baptised by Bishop Finan of Lindisfarne at Ad Muram (probably the village of Heddon) and on his return to Repton was accompanied by his bride and the four priests. He was given responsibility for Mercia from about Stafford through to Leicester - ideal for someone based here.

The intention was to convert the Mercians and re-convert the Middle Angles (who had lapsed somewhat). King Penda did not convert. He permitted the campaign but did not endorse it which may have rendered it less fruitful than might have been. However, Bede states that many were converted – of all classes. So it is possible that the nine early graves in the vicarage garden that were unearthed in the spring this year, may have been of some of these early converts. Undoubtedly Christian, with no grave goods and no evidence of coffins, they must be part of a larger cemetery. However, it is not impossible that they date from the Roman period as they were close to finds indicating a high status Romano-British building somewhere not too far away and Bede was aware of an earlier Christian, Romano British presence.

But what of those priests?

Penda was killed by Oswiu at the battle of Winwaed (a river near Doncaster) in 655 and so Mercia became subservient to Northumbria. Peada was given responsibility for Mercia south of the Trent, and Mercia became officially a Christian Kingdom.

- At this point Diuma was consecrated as Mercia's first Bishop by Bishop Finan and it is assumed his Holy See was here in Repton. Diuma died soon after and there were 4 subsequent bishops before his brother Chad was recalled from retirement in the monastery at Lastingham and became bishop. He was given land at Lichfield for a monastery by Peada's successor King Wulfhere and he moved the Holy See there.
- Betti founded the church at Wirksworth and was eventually buried there. His magnificent grave cover was found in 1820 under the sanctuary floor close to the altar and is now embedded in the north wall of the church.
- Cedd may have been briefly active here, but he was sent farther east to the East Saxon kingdom where he was appointed bishop and founded monasteries at Tilbury and Bradwell on Sea. Part of the latter survives as the restored chapel of St Peter on the Wall. He was then requested to build a monastery in North Yorkshire and chose a wild place, now Lastingham. He died there of the plague in 664.
- Very little is known about Adda. It is likely that he was active in the founding of the monastery at Medeshamstede (Peterborough) which was funded and promoted by Peada - now sub-king (under Oswiu of Northumbria) of Mercia south of the Trent – and by Oswiu. This has to be before 656 because that is when Peada was murdered by the treachery of his wife.

This is the skimpiest version of the stories and there is so much more to it for anyone interested in the 600s..

Paul Stevens' talk

In April, Paul gave us a wonderful talk on Repton School's recovery from serious decline in the late 1700s and has very kindly, given us a transcript and many related notes from the school archive. One of the characters he discussed was Head Master John Macauley (known to the scholars as Jack). George Denman (later MP and High Court Judge) remembered his time under Macauley and an extract follows:

"Repton, at the time I went there, had only 58 boys, all told, belonging to the school; and of these 8 were foundation boys appointed by the Hereditary Governors in rotation, as a mere matter of favour to their friends, or poor relations, and a good many more were day-boys, sons of tradesmen or farmers, who had the privilege of being educated in the school for very small payments.

It was singularly wanting in all the advantages, which now exist in such abundance in English Public Schools, for enabling boys to enjoy healthy games and exercises. We had no cricket- ground; no fives, or racket-courts; no gymnasium. Our football was played upon the gravel drive which leads from a fine old arch at the entrance of the Old Priory grounds and passes between two gate posts, on its way to the Hall, where the Head Master lived. The churchyard wall bounded this ground upon the West, and the School Buildings part of the Old Priory on the East, and on the Western side were five enormous elms (parts of three only of which survive), very near the churchyard wall, round which many struggles took place, not unlike the rougeing (part of the Eton Football game) of which Eton boys spoke as being one of the most deadly forms of struggle connected with that game. Sometimes prisoner's-base, sometimes rounders were the fashion; but the want of regular playgrounds drove us to devise other methods of obtaining the exercise which our youthful instincts required, and among these paper chases were perhaps the most popular. I find in a letter of May 24th, 1834, to my mother, the following passage: "On Saturday we had a fox-hunt. The fox was a very fast runner, and I was a hound, and took the lead all the way."

I soon afterwards had the satisfaction of receiving the name of "Fly" from our Master of the Hounds, and having obtained a needle and some Indian ink, inscribed that name with the figures 1835 upon my left arm, where it is plainly visible to this day (4/11/93).

But my favourite method of obtaining exercise was a long run with a companion on the coach-road, with or without a coach to run against. In this way I covered a great many miles. On one occasion I ran to Derby and back in two hours, which, by the old route across Willington Ferry, was then reckoned as seventeen miles; and the same afternoon to Burton and back, which was called nine miles: both distances were, I think, somewhat over-estimated, but probably the two journeys amounted to about twenty-three miles -without missing a calling-over- pretty well for a boy of fourteen or fifteen, for both journeys involve a good many steepish hills."

Comments and more information about Repton and its occupants are always welcomed.
For more information on the newsletter content or the History Group please contact us on
tjnorman4@yahoo.co.uk or visit our website:
<https://reptonvillage.org.uk/repton-village-history-group>