

Repton Village History Group Newsletter

Summer 2016 (Vn2)



The meteorologists are ahead of us again, but the astronomical summer starts on the solstice – June 20th so this newsletter must now be due.

The ongoing programme

June 18 th	Visit to the Vicarage garden archaeological excavations- booking required
June 21 st	Catrine Jarman – origins of the skeletons in the vicarage mound and current archaeological developments.
June 22 nd	Visit to the Vicarage garden archaeological excavations - booking required
July 20 th	Afternoon visit to Sinai Park House near Burton on Trent - booking required
August 17 th	Afternoon visit to Catton Hall for tour of house, church and gardens and afternoon tea. - booking required
September 20 th	Members evening – Chris Pegg – “Wooden box part II “and Paul Heapy – “Two Fields”.
October 18 th	Richard Stone - “The River Trent” a water transport route.
November 15 th	Alan Hiley – “History of the Trent Motor Traction company”.
December 20 th	Social with speaker.
January 17 th	Shirley Horton – “Street Names and Chimney Pots”
February 21 st	Lee Timmins – “The English Highwayman”
March 21 st	Member’s 10 minute talks
April 18 th	Arnold Burston “Robert Sherbourne, Bishop and Diplomat” local boy made good
May 16 th	Robert Mee “Bradshaw’s and an early railway tour” and our AGM
June 20 th	Archive evening/archaeology catch-up

Meetings take place in the Village Hall (DE65 6GR) at 7.30pm.
All are welcome. Members £2.00, Visitors £3.00. Tea, coffee and biscuits included.

AGM: This took place at our May meeting and the Committee and officers were reappointed: Andy Austen - Chairman and acting Treasurer, Ivor Sandars - vice-chairman, Jenny Sayers - Publications, John Kidd - Minutes and Membership Secretary, Jeanette Griffiths – committee member. A Treasurer is urgently needed.

Our thanks go to all who help to make our events run smoothly – Margaret Austen and Christine, Jeanette and Hilary who help her in the kitchen, Chris Pegg and Paul Heapy on the door, Brian Hazelwood who wires the speakers for sound, John Kidd who supervises the seating arrangements, Jenny Sayers with the book stall etc and, of course, our speakers.

We have had a very successful year when measured against our constitutional purposes and our archaeological projects are now very active. Of particular pleasure was the number of members offering to do 10 minute talks – so much so that we have an extra member’s evening scheduled for September.

Financially, our reserves are sound and we are more than paying our way due to Jenny’s efforts with publications. We had an operating deficit due to the initial cost of publishing the “Stroll Through Repton of Yesteryear” booklet but this should be regarded as an investment. Our thanks go again to John Caws who both advised the treasurer and audited the books.

Walks n Talks: We have a number of ‘walks n talks’ booked for this summer – Pinxton and South Normanton Local History Society, Burton U3A, Ashby Camera Club, and Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society plus talks to give to the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust and to Etwall and Burnaston History Group. If anyone would like to get involved in giving talks, please let a committee member know.

Family History Enquiries: The work we did on the Turner family - tailors and dressmakers in Repton - is just about finished. It took a surprising twist when we encountered a damp couple in the rain in the churchyard. They were also looking for Turners and having put them in touch with the Franzens in New Zealand, it is clear that on the male side, they are related. We have a lot of information on the Poxon family now, but just need to get it sorted into a sensible form. Meanwhile a couple of more pressing issues arose to divert us. Trustees of the Newton Solney Alms Houses were seeking descendants of the Ratcliff family who had made a significant contribution to them. The family were founder partners and directors of Bass, Ratcliff and Gretton brewery but appear to have died out in the 1950s. Then Martin Flowerdew asked for help to trace descendants of George Wiffin – born 1822 in Norfolk. His grandparents had acquired a beautifully scripted book of writing exercises by George aged 12 and he wondered how it had come into his family’s possession and if there were descendants he could pass it onto. An intriguing search revealed what seems to have been a slightly tragic family which died out in the 1930s. The book and the story has now been lodged with Norfolk Record office.

We still have to tackle the work on the Clamp and Smedley families.

Archiving: We are still listing Alan Kimber's material for the archive, and still have to finish David Guest's archive and also have material from Ivor Sandars, Pat Smythe, Sue Ellis and Bunty Marshall to deal with. We are very grateful for all this material – and if anyone fancies helping with the listings, please let us know. You do need to have access to a PC with Word for Windows or Open Office on it. We have recently received a nice 1923 large scale map from Sue Ellis and a scan of an 1829 large scale map from DRO. The Vicar has recently passed across an book of certificates of baptism for Foremark– most blank but with stubs for Isiah Armson (Dec 1838), William Murfin and Fanny Thacker(Jan 1839) plus a completed certificate as a certified copy of one from an earlier book dated May 1789 for Sarah daughter of John Pearsal(?). We will photograph the entries and then lodge the original in the DRO. He also provided photocopies of letters from the Church Commissioners recording that St Saviour's Foremark had been included in a list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest under the Town and Country Planning Act. Intriguingly there is a similar letter relating to Anchor Church which perhaps hasn't been used for religious purposes since St Hardulph around 800 AD.

Sand and Gravel extraction in the Trent Valley: Derbyshire County Council have been consulting over their assessments of sites for future sand and gravel extraction. This necessarily comes from the river valleys and so the Trent valley is likely to be a major potential contributor. Indeed this has been the case around Shardlow and Swarkestone for many years.

The sites of major concern to us are bordered by the Trent and are the proposed Swarkestone South site (really Anchor Church and Foremark) and the Foremark site (really Milton and Repton).

The assessment categorises sites into 3 groups – good for extraction, poor for extraction and in-between. The Repton site is poor and, hopefully, will not be included this time. The Foremark site is in-between and so it remains to be seen if it is selected.

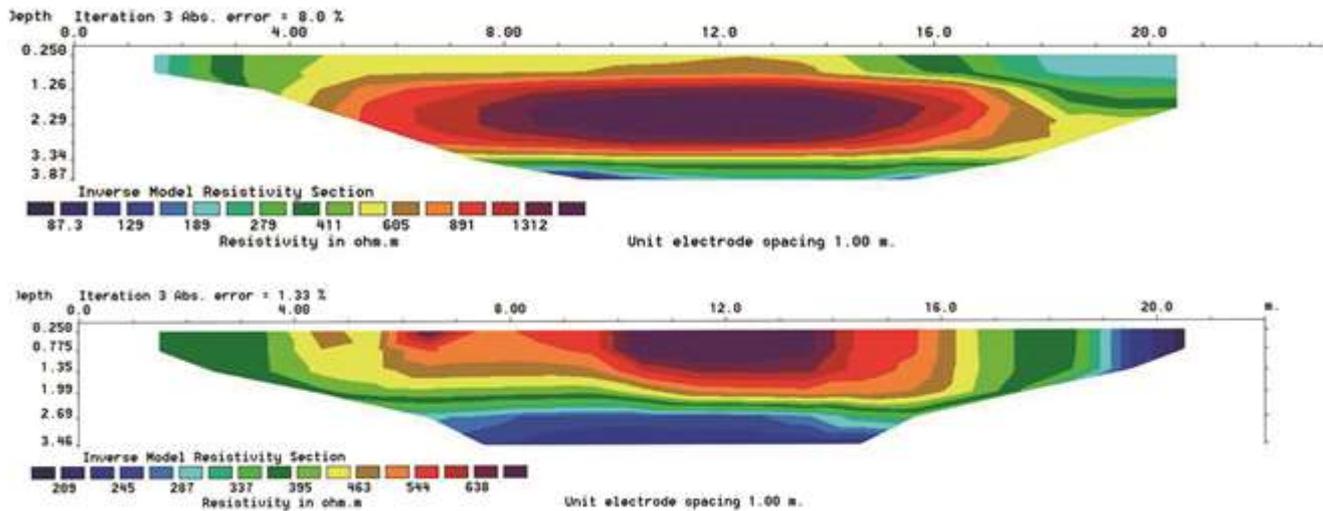
The assessment does take into account heritage and archaeological potential but only as one of many factors. We did make a comment reinforcing the historical heritage and archaeological potential of both sites. Both sites have the potential for significant archaeology but, just as importantly, they provide the context for the internationally important site at Repton. A comment was made that the importance of Foremark should not be under-rated either. The Danish word for Foremark was Fornewerke - old fortification – so there is likely to have been something of importance there before 873/4. The cultural heritage of that part of the valley is important too. A crucial transport route for Anglo-Saxons, for Vikings, and the route down which St Guthlac set off from Repton to found the religious community at Crowland Abbey.

It was pointed out that while an archaeological watching brief would almost certainly be required, that is an unplanned approach - relying on things turning up rather than a planned archaeological study that can ensure that all avenues are covered and finds followed up. For example, in the Science Priory watching brief, hammer scale and semi-molten metal was found indicating that there was at least a forge nearby if not metal smelting. But there was no opportunity to follow this up and determine dates or locations. There are serious suggestions that the islands in the Trent were the winter camp of much of the Viking Army and both sites ought to be the subject of a proper archaeological study before any extraction occurred.

An unexpected find: Apart from ridge and furrow, nothing of real historical interest has been found on the fields undergoing the Longlands and Mount Pleasant developments. Even so, it's proximity to Askew Hill caused the planners to insist on some archaeological work preceding the building. Nothing significant was found. But then out of the blue we heard that something thought initially to be part of a Roman Helmet had turned up on the Mount Pleasant site. That looked a plausible identification but even without a reference to give us scale, it was clear that it was not big enough to fit on the top of a helmet. A roman expert at Vindolanda confirmed it was not Roman but suggested Viking. A leading Viking expert confirmed it was not Viking, but wondered if it was late medieval (C1300- 1500). The Portable Antiquities officer had seen small items with similar swan's head designs dating from 1750 to 1850. The general consensus at the moment is that it is based on a Roman style (and they took some of their inspiration from the ancient Greeks). It is more likely to have come off a staff of some sort and may not be that old, but the fact that it was buried is puzzling. We will probably never know any more, and it can remain as an interesting mystery to ponder over in the pub.

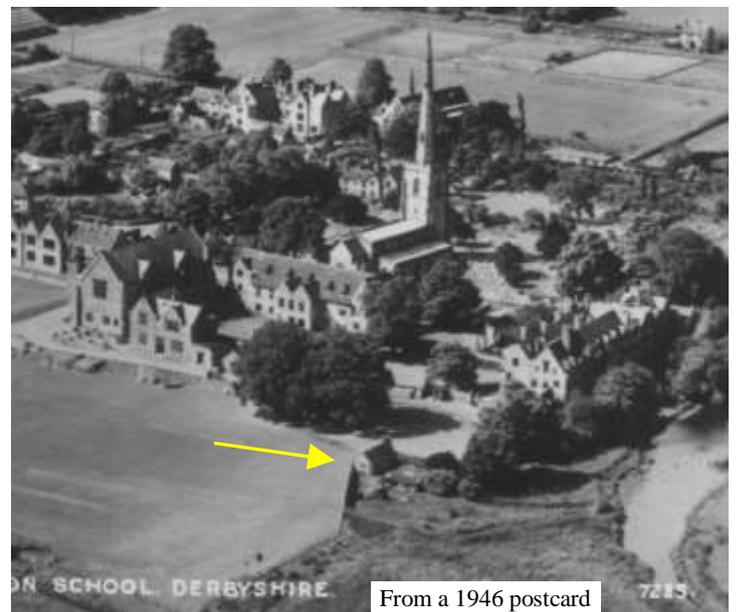


Medieval Tile Kiln: Over Easter we were able to do more resistivity surveying of the Medieval Tile Kiln site. This time we were looking at cross sections of the underlying archaeology using pseudo sections. These measure the resistance at varying depths along a line. High resistances may indicate a void or materials such as stone, gravel, mortar or tile, while low resistance may indicate damp sands or soils. When it was first found in 1866, it was recorded and then covered with boards and eventually turfed over. Surely over the years these boards must have collapsed and the resulting depression filled in, but the purple in the sections shown represent very high resistances – possibly the void is still there. The two sections are at right angles to each other – the first being east-west and the second north-south.



The archaeologists currently working in the Vicarage garden have brought their magnetometer and their ground penetrating radar with them and so are planning to do a magnetometry survey of the kiln which should show the archaeology much better than our resistivity.

Medieval Priory Mill: They also plan to run the radar over our best guess site for the Medieval Priory mill. This is buried under a few feet of power station ash and the radar should penetrate it much better than our resistance surveys. The logic behind this location is that we know that while the mill was still operating for the priory, the lessee built a two bay dwelling beside it. Even though the mill probably went out of use in the mid 1600s as a result of John Harpur's shenanigans with the water supply, the accommodation would have remained as a useful building for many years and the outline of its foundations may still be preserved underground. At the best guess of the location of the mill by Alan Gifford (a mills expert) we discovered that there had been a building – and it was in existence until after 1957. It is on the 1881 map, but not the 1829 version. We have a 1946 aerial photograph of it and there is a feature to the north that runs into the Old Trent Water and looks as though it could be the remnants of a water channel. So we speculate that this might be on the site of the two bay mill dwelling. It also fits reasonably with the record that the mill was 10 yards to the west of the fish ponds (the remains of which are shown on the 1829 map) and is probably close enough to the priory buildings for its mill stream to have been useable for flushing the latrines of the Priory. If so, then the radar might just pick up any foundations of the mill that would have stood beside it. The possible remnants of the channel also arrive at the Old Trent about where the 1762 map shows it should. Circumstantial and full of wishful thinking, but more resistivity work is planned for summer evenings in the school summer holidays.



The Vicarage Garden: During the digs directed by Professor and Mrs Biddle in the 1970s and 80s, work was done in the Vicarage garden - particularly with the mound that seemed to have been used as a chanel house. Now, more than 30 years later, technology has advanced tremendously and so Prof Mark Horton (one of Biddle's original team) and some of his PhD students re-surveyed some of the areas including the garden. They

found some indications of a rectangular building some 45cm down plus some other scattered anomalies. Now they are back with a team of students from Bristol University, patiently scraping their way down to find these walls and dodging heavy rain and hail showers in the process. They have opened up a big area and so have had to carefully remove a huge amount of soil.

Now half way through the dig, stone work has emerged where expected, but as yet it is difficult to say if it was a wall. There are indications of a corner, but a number of quern stones (for domestic grain milling) are among the stones and seem to be in the wall. It is difficult to date the querns but some suggest they are Anglo-Saxon. Some medieval pottery has also been found together with bits of slag from metal processing and charcoal and some metal finds - like very large iron nails.



Waiting to start



The first turf



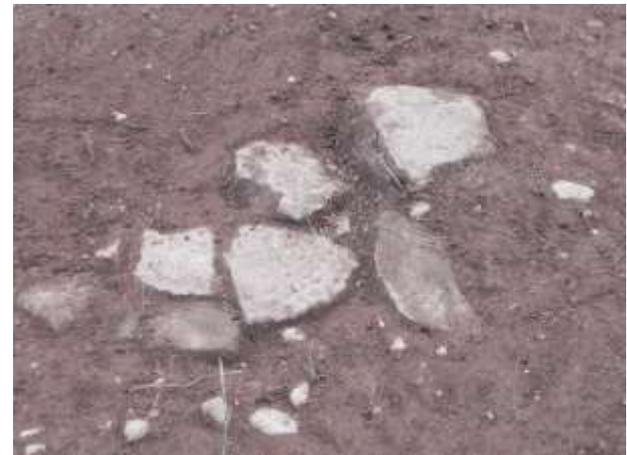
A wall (?)



Bits of quern Stones



Lesley and Emily – local diggers



More bits of querns

To make comments or for more information, please contact Andy Austen on rvhg@reptonvillage.org.uk or 01283 702448
We are always pleased to receive information about the locality and the people that lived and worked near here.