



# Repton Village History Group Newsletter

## Late Summer 2017 (August 2017)



There has been quite a bit going on since the last Newsletter, so this is an extra issue.

### The ongoing programme of talks:

Sept 19 <sup>th</sup>	Ivor Sandars	– “A History of the Derby Telegraph.”
Oct 17 <sup>th</sup>	Richard Stone	– “The Luttrell Psalter”.
Nov 21 <sup>st</sup>	Colin Stewart	– “Calke Park and Estate, the Archaeology”.
Dec 19 <sup>th</sup>	Keith Blood	– “Christmas is Coming”.

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.

For a number of reasons we are not planning a programme of talks next year – among the reasons are the 7 other history groups within 7 miles of Repton who also provide monthly talks. We will try to keep people abreast of what is available at those groups but will ourselves have project forums and speakers on specific topics as appropriate.

**Catrine Jarman’s talk:** In June, Cat Jarman spoke to us about her Phd work using isotope analysis on the mass of bones from the disarticulated skeletons found in the 1980’s in the mound in the vicarage garden. She also told us about the dig she was supervising on a new site there (reported below). Although it was suspected that the bodies were placed there by Vikings in 873/4AD and confirmed in part by coins of that date, there was a serious discrepancy in the carbon dating between two groups of the bones. Cat’s analysis revealed that the earlier dated bones had enjoyed a marine diet and thus were absorbing carbon from the oceans that had already been around for a long time. The other group were eating land based plants and animals and the carbon was thus much newer. Correcting for this brought the two sets of dates nicely into line. Analysis of oxygen isotopes obtained from the dentine in teeth can also identify the characteristics of the geology at the source of water that the person had drunk in childhood. A small band of Cat’s samples were found likely to be locals, another



*The bones found in the mound during the 1980s dig  
Photo from the Village Archive*

*Some of the coins dating the mound.  
Burgred was King of Mercia when  
the Vikings attacked.*



*Photo provided by Derby Museum*

much broader band were not local (but with less confidence), but there were two other widely differing bands that were both from geological areas corresponding with Viking origins but different regions. This suggests that the Great Heathen Army was likely to be composed of men from different places and cultures. 20% of the skeletons were of women. Cat hazarded the suggestion that the skeletons were Viking dead brought together for re-burial from the sites of battles. She had also looked at the 3 skeletons of youngsters buried separately but close to the mass grave. One of these turned out to be local and not Viking. He was buried facing away from the other two. There were a number of other graves on and around the mound which also contained



*Catrine Jarman –  
from Viking  
Territories herself.*

Viking skeletons and it is likely that these are people who settled locally after the 873/4 raid and whose remains were buried close to a site so important to them.

Dr Robert Stoddart (a pathologist at Manchester University) has analysed the bones and was in the audience. He is writing one of the 3 volumes of Biddle’s work in Repton and was able to answer a suggestion that the people in the grave might have died as a result of an illness. His research had found that many of the bones bore the signs of violent injury. He had also found that there were clear signs in many cases, of damage to the bones of the shoulders – just what would be expected of people who spent much time rowing without the benefit of the modern sliding seat.

### **An important stone:**



Also in the audience for Cat's talk was Professor Martin Biddle who had with him a carved stone borrowed back from Derby Museum a few weeks earlier. It represented the bottom quarter of an early Anglo-Saxon Cross and it is suspected that it was a grave marker associated with the ornate grave cover found near the mound and now in Derby Museum (copy in St Wystan's Church). Possibly the marker of an early Royal Grave pre-dating the Viking burials in the mound. It is particularly special because it has holes drilled through it – the first time drilled stone of this age has been found. "Rifling" marks in the holes indicate that a rotating bit was used and small fragments of stone scored the bore as it was formed. Professor Biddle speculated that the holes might have been there to hold ribbons or sticks radiating out with ribbons adorning them. Using the facilities in MS Word, we have reconstructed how the complete cross might have appeared:



*Grave cover in Derby Museum*



### **The dig in the Vicarage garden:**

The Bristol University team under Cat Jarman and her Professor, Mark Horton, were back for 3 weeks this year. There are several objectives to this work – one is to seek evidence that Repton was indeed the site of the Viking winter camp in 873-4 and not just a burial ground and another is to seek evidence of the Anglo-Saxon monastery (founded about 660AD) and the Royal residences (dating from as early as 550AD).

Last year, ground penetrating radar had led them to open up a large rectangular area of ground. They were hoping to find traces of a wall and possibly a building similar to the one found under the mound in the 1600's by Thomas Walker and dug properly by The Biddles in the 1980s. In fact they found an arrangement of stones – including some 90 pieces of broken quern stones and a number of post holes and a low mound covered with or made of pebbles. Artefacts included Anglo-Saxon items and Viking items – including gaming pieces, arrow heads, part of a broken axe head, a seax (knife) and nails. Very impressive was a large roved nail as is used for building clinker hulled ships (like Viking longships!). This plus some potential lines of more nails under the mound sensed by a metal detector led to wild speculation that there might just be a ship burial.

This year the hole was enlarged by a metre each way and once this was painstakingly excavated to the same levels as the earlier work, the pebble mound was quartered – each quarter being excavated with small hand trowels and occasionally





*Making a start on the gravel covering of the mound*

mattocks. Improved spoil management meant that very few finds were missed. Surprisingly even a couple of bits of pottery were found by the metal detector. A bank was left standing along the interfaces of the quarters so that the stratification was evident. Sadly (but not surprisingly) there was no ship burial and after a couple of weeks of seriously hard work by the archaeologists (hard packed gravel is difficult to excavate with a trowel), it was agreed that an undisturbed natural level had been reached. Anglo-Saxon and Viking items had been found – including sherds of pottery, different sorts of horse shoe nails and equestrian items, remnants of woodworking tools, scraps of lead as though from casting in moulds, and pieces of iron slag and miscellaneous, and often tiny, pieces of iron. The undisturbed, natural surface had a number of areas where it had been cut through and these were carefully excavated as there might

have been graves. In fact no graves were found and theories abound as to the purpose of the slots and holes – which the experts will no doubt sort out before next year. In the third week the corner of the dig was enlarged and a second, 2m square, pit started. This revealed much less gravel, more finds and a much wetter situation. There are tantalising features in the 2m pit which will be investigated next year. At the moment the suspicion is that the low mound is in fact a number of layers of deliberately laid hard surfaces providing an industrial area for making or repairing all manner of items and keeping the winter mud at bay – just the sort of thing an over-wintering army would have needed.

Interestingly, some Roman material was also found – a couple of small fragments of glass (both painted and coloured), a few pottery sherds and opus signinum – the Roman mortar. These suggest the presence of a high status Roman or Romano-British residence not too far away.

Funding has been promised for next year so we look forward to meeting many of the students and staff from Bristol again. Meanwhile we have been carrying out a resistivity grid survey to augment their radar and magnetometry work and, probably, will add a pseudo-section or two.

We would like to record our sincere thanks to Cat, Henry Webber and Mark Horton for the time they put into the open evening on the site and to Rev. Martin Flowerdew for kindly allowing us all to further trample his lawn.

**The way forward for the Village History Group:** We decided that we should stop organising monthly speakers on historical topics as we no longer had the resources to organise it and still achieve the group's objectives. We also counted 7 other history groups providing talks every month within 7 miles of Repton and we were making a small loss on most of our meetings.

At the same time that we have decided on this change, St Wystan's church have launched a "Friends of St Wystan's" group which intends to hold annual (or more frequent) lectures on topics of local interest. These are likely to be by seriously learned folk and should be excellent. It is understood that the Head Master, and Professors Martin Biddle and Mark Horton are among those who will have roles in the group.

Meanwhile we will be looking for folk who would like to get involved in projects to enhance our knowledge of Repton at all stages of history from stone-age to the 1900s. Suggestions include interviewing and recording more of the memories of our older villagers, relating the 1881 map and 1881 census so we know who lived where (could be done for 1901 too), auditing all the old stone in the buildings and walls of Repton and Milton to try to work out its source (priory, local quarry...), maintaining the memorial records for the graveyards, taking part in the test pit survey or the search for the Medieval Mill, creating a digital version of the archive, bringing Ken Ash's timeline up to date and so on. The idea is that these would be taken on by individuals or small groups working at their own pace and feeding back to the rest of us occasionally.



*Prof. Mark Horton using a drone to take a vertical photo of the site.*



### Test pit survey:

We know there was an Anglo-Saxon settlement here from about 550AD with a monastery and a royal establishment and that this grew into a medieval village with a Priory on what is now the Repton School site. However we do not know the extent of either settlement nor the rate of growth. So it is hoped that a whole series of test pits over a number of years will help to determine this. With more interest from the village, we called a meeting in St Wystan's Church (with thanks to Rev Martin Flowerdew) and concluded that there were enough people to enable us to tackle 4 pits simultaneously on a Saturday morning and a date of 12<sup>th</sup> August was set for this. We then set about finding 4 initial locations where we could get permission to dig.



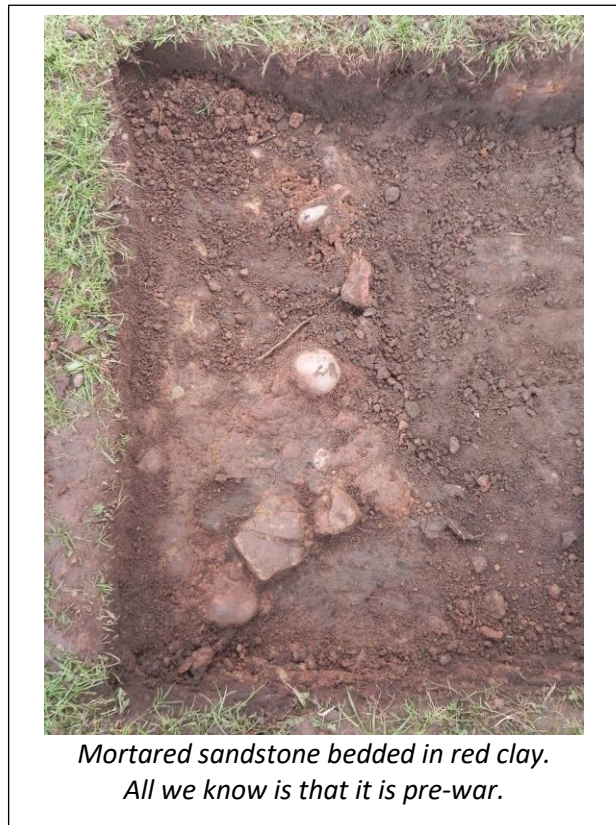
*Training pit nicely set up*

We are grateful to Repton School for permission to dig in the gravel surround of the Old Mitre car park and to Dave at the Red Lion for approval for a test pit in the grass behind the Pub. The latter is subject to the OK from Marstons. Two other pits in village gardens are also planned. We are using the guidance published by Leicester University – which is very similar to that given by the late Professor Mick Aston of Time Team fame. We will also be using their excellent recording booklet and a soil colour chart based on biscuit colours! We organised a training test pit up by the Crescent and went right through the process so that everyone that wanted to, could have a go and learn the basics. We did improve our technique – getting the surfaces flat and clean, sides vertical and learning not to dig things out of the surface but to clear the soil from around them. We also learned a lot about the resources required - human, equipment and time, and how we should properly use the recording booklet.



*Digging under way*

We were not expecting to find anything with much age and reached the natural soil level at 0.44m down where it was silty sand the colour of ginger-nuts. We did find quite a bit of post war rubbish.



*Mortared sandstone bedded in red clay.  
All we know is that it is pre-war.*



*Just how many diggers can you get in a 1m square hole?*



**Summer visits:** In the end there were just nine members booked for the trip to Newark to the National Civil War Centre and the Towers and Undercroft tour of the Castle. We look forward to our visit to Melbourne Hall in August with a much bigger party.

**Family History Enquiries:** Again, we have still to find time for the trip to the Record Office in Matlock for our Poxon enquiry, but family history enquiries have been relatively quiet. We are interested in the Towle family – although the researcher identifies them as Repton Blacksmiths we have only been able to find them smithying in Twyford so far. If anyone knows better, please let us know. We also hunted for information on a farming family – the Brooks family. Mary Ann Brooks was a popular great Aunt and her great daughter in law – Esther Sarah Brooks (née Barnes) died in Repton in 1957. We were able to identify with some precision where her son lived (in Stanton) but none of the Brooks we found in Repton seemed to fit into the family. Again, if anyone can help or remembers farmer Jim Brooks, please do contact us. A chance encounter in the Post office led us to a group of visiting members of the Melen family. They were from various parts of the USA and Canada and had previously met the Melens who kept the Bakery and Confectioners shop at the Stone House. We were able to put them in touch with Janet and David in Pinfold lane. We have just provided information about Brook End to someone searching his wife's paternal ancestors – surname Shaw. He had traced it back to Thomas Shaw and his son Rev Samuel Shaw who was born in Repton in 1635. Thomas seems to have been a blacksmith in Brook End so we were able to confirm that (much later) the census shows a blacksmith there. Bigsby and Messiter both refer to one. Mick Groom has of course, retired from smithying there just a year or so ago and the current forge is still there behind his house.

**Derby Museum Volunteering:** Shelagh has continued researching artefacts for the museum for a major forthcoming display.

The work listing The Biddle's Repton dig artefacts came to a halt before the end of the listing we were using. The later entries were not useable without a lot more explanation from the compiler. This work has temporarily stopped anyway for the summer as we have diverted priority to doing resistivity surveys on the southern end of the field in front of Catton Hall. At the northern end the other team have almost certainly located (and got a good image of) the foundations of the medieval hall. At the southern end we have just discovered the edge of a large lake linked to the River Trent.

The museum have recently produced a scanned image of a little carved medieval man which was for some decades on the windowsill of St Wystan's vestry but is now on loan for display in the museum.

You can see this image and rotate it in all directions by searching for:

[https://sketchfab.com/models/6fe0d07118104ce5910c3102beae327e?utm\\_source=email&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=model-shared](https://sketchfab.com/models/6fe0d07118104ce5910c3102beae327e?utm_source=email&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=model-shared) on the internet. Hold down the left mouse button and give the statue a twirl.

As mentioned earlier, at the talk by Cat Jarman, Professor Biddle took the opportunity to bring to us a stone that he was returning to Derby Museum. It was from the dig in the 1980s and this is the first time evidence has been found that the Anglo-Saxons were capable of drilling stone. It is hoped that Derby Museum will produce a 3d scanned image of the stone which may allow us to look inside the holes in some detail.



**Medieval Priory Mill:** The possible wall that we reported in the last issue turned out to be the in-fill on the line of the channel that we think may have been the leet. It is good that this confirms our interpretation of the pseudo-sections. We would like to do more surveying in the summer break.

Another pseudo-section nearer to Brook End revealed an unexpected very low resistance area south of the 1<sup>st</sup> team cricket pitch. It is possible that this is an indication of the mill pond. One would certainly have been needed. Tests on the winter flow of the brook demonstrated that it is not capable of driving a mill with out a pond.

**Medieval Tithe Barn:** We have still to find time to do a resistivity survey of the lawn at 18 Milton Road – a higher and flatter potential site than the one indicated by the 1762 map but still within the errors of early mapping and our overlaying of it on a modern map.

To make comments or for more information, please contact Andy Austen on [rvhg@reptonvillage.org.uk](mailto: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.