



Repton Village History Group Newsletter

Winter 2016 (21 December 2016)



The winter solstice (21st December this year) is both the shortest day and the astronomical start of winter. I think the meteorologists may have a better date with the start of December as it certainly feels like winter by then and it is more convenient for the distribution of this newsletter.

The ongoing programme of talks:

2016

December 20th Colin Stewart “Calke from Medieval Priory to Elizabethan Mansion” followed by seasonal refreshments.

2017

January 17th Shirley Horton - “Street Names and Chimney Pots”

February 21st Lee Timmins - “The English Highwayman”

March 21st Members evening - Chris Pegg: “Wooden box part II “and Paul Heapy: “Two Fields”.

April 18th Arnold Burston - “Robert Sherbourne, Bishop and Diplomat” - local boy made good.

May 16th Robert Mee - “Bradshaw’s and an early railway tour” and our AGM.

June 20th Archive evening/archaeology catch-up.

July Visit - suggestions required please.

August Visit - suggestions required please.

September 19th Alan Hiley -talk yet to be selected.

October 17th Richard Stone - “The Luttrell Psalter”.

November 21st Colin Stewart - “Calke Park and estate - the archaeology”.

December 19th 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.

Change in membership date

Our financial year-end is 31st March and our AGM is in May. At the moment, memberships are renewable at the end of March, but since our constitution gives members 3 months to renew, we never know at the AGM who is (or will be) a member. So, to clarify things, we are moving the membership year to coincide with the calendar year. This will result in the current membership year being shortened and if anyone is much aggrieved by this, then please contact us and we will reimburse a proportional amount.

Membership is £4 for individuals (£8 for families) and reduces entry to meetings with speakers by £1. So if you attend all meetings, you can save at least a fiver – pays for the membership.

Possible test pit survey

There are a number of “known unknowns” about Repton. Where was the Anglo-Saxon village and how big was it, where was the Anglo-Saxon monastery founded by Werberga, where was the medieval tithe barn, where was the medieval Priory mill, how extensive was the medieval village? Traces of the monastery may be found by the Bristol University work and we are addressing the mill and the barn issues using documentary and archaeological research, but there is a suggestion that a thorough survey using an array of one metre square archaeological test pits across the historic core of the village might give good clues to some of the other issues. And who knows we might uncover some “unknown unknowns” too. We do have a few people with skills in archaeological excavation and, funding permitting, basic training can be given to others and a professional archaeologist made available to examine finds and assess the results. If we are to do this then we will need to commit to a programme of work and the people to accomplish it. If you think you might be interested then please do get in touch.

Funding Catrine Jarman

Archaeological field work can swallow budgets quickly and although provision is always made for analysing and documenting the findings, there is pressure for archaeologists to get on with the next project or other aspects of their professional lives. So while the important conclusions from the work of Professor and Mrs Biddle in the 70s

and 80s has been published and most of the finds identified and stored away, there is still work to be done to publish it all. Three volumes are planned. The one dealing with the anthropology has been written by Dr Bob Stoddart in Manchester and runs to some 11 chapters. However the work done by Catrine Jarman in her Phd applying isotope analysis to the remains from the vicarage mound may need some of the chapters to be reworked prior to publication. When her Phd is finished, Cat will be writing the second volume dealing with the artefacts found during the digs. This is a substantial task and she is starting now to seek funding for the work. The History Group committee has decided that this is exactly the sort of investment we should be able to support as it will contribute so much to our detailed understanding of our early history and so has committed £500 to the task. There has also been a matching private commitment. While these monies will not go far towards the cost of the work, it does demonstrate the local community's support and should help when seeking grants and other funding. Sadly Cat has not been well and this has led to an extended timescale for her Phd, but hopefully she will cope with that, the possible archaeology in Repton next summer and the writing up of the Biddle's work. We wish her well.

Dating the crypt

Understanding our earlier history can only be based on documentary sources or archaeological investigation and combinations of the two. As our knowledge and technology develops, new interpretations are possible. Also, viewing the data from a different perspective or academic discipline may result in alternative propositions. At a recent lecture at the Society of Antiquarians to which Richard Finch was invited, Prof Eric Fernie (a Scottish art historian) challenged the generally accepted dating of the crypt. Actually, there was little controversy over the date of the original sunken, stone lined structure and its likely early purpose as a baptistery. It's when the pillars, stone ceiling and chancel were built that is challenged. Dr Harold Taylor who spent some 30 years studying the construction of the church and Prof Biddle who did the excavations around the chancel and crypt concluded that the work was done before Wiglaf's body was interred there in 839, but Prof Eric Fernie suspects it is later. His argument is that this sort of work is important enough to be celebrating some important religious event - such as when St Wystan was interred there (about 849) or canonised or even later after the Viking attack in 873/4. You can hear the lecture and watch the slides on Youtube - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2v1_K4LaA40. I think most of us who have listened to the argument are sticking to the Biddle conclusion, but it is always important to remember that someone coming from a different discipline can make a very different interpretation.

Walks n Talks:

We have already got a walk n talk booked for 2017 in April for Tha Engliscan Gesithas – an Anglo-Saxon society. This is old English for 'The English Companions', gesithas being the companions or bodyguards of a king. This will be preceded by a talk on Repton's history in March at Long Eaton. It arose as the result of a chance meeting in Derby Museum where they hold some of their meetings.

Family History Enquiries:

- We have still to visit the Record Office at Matlock to hunt for Dawn Poxon's grandparent's dates of death for their tree in the Repton memorial arboretum. We have found some information on the Drapers but have yet to bring that to a conclusion but are in touch with a relative who will be visiting from New Zealand and have offered to help her search. Our work with the Hanson's is complete although there are a couple of references in the Village Archive that we want to look at to see if they are relevant.
- More recently we have had a conversation with John Kidger whose family history story starts in 1735 in Repton with Thomas Kiddyder with a marriage bond. He was marrying a widow, Anne Eaton (a good Repton name) who was 12 years his senior – hence the need for the bond. They actually married at Twyford but both are named on the bond as “of Repton”. It seems that Thomas didn't originate in Repton as their children's Settlement Examination papers say that he had himself gained settlement in Repton. Unfortunately that settlement paper cannot be traced so where he originated remains unknown. The family moved about a lot, but eventually one of the sons resettled in Repton, but he and his brother and their families then moved to Chesterfield about 1780. But it's possible that their parents Thomas and Anne moved back to Repton as there is a burial record for an Anne Kidger in Repton in 1783, and Kidger is the modern corruption of Kiddyder. Another mystery is that Repton's Churchwardens were anxious to avoid one of Anne and Thomas' pregnant daughters-in-law becoming a burden on Repton in 1787 – her husband and father being in Chesterfield. All very confusing, and it would be good to help sort it out.

Archive listing:

We have made some progress with this and have a number of boxes ready to go up into the archive. There is still plenty more to do, so if anyone is prepared to help, they will be very welcome. You just need a PC with Word for Windows or similar.

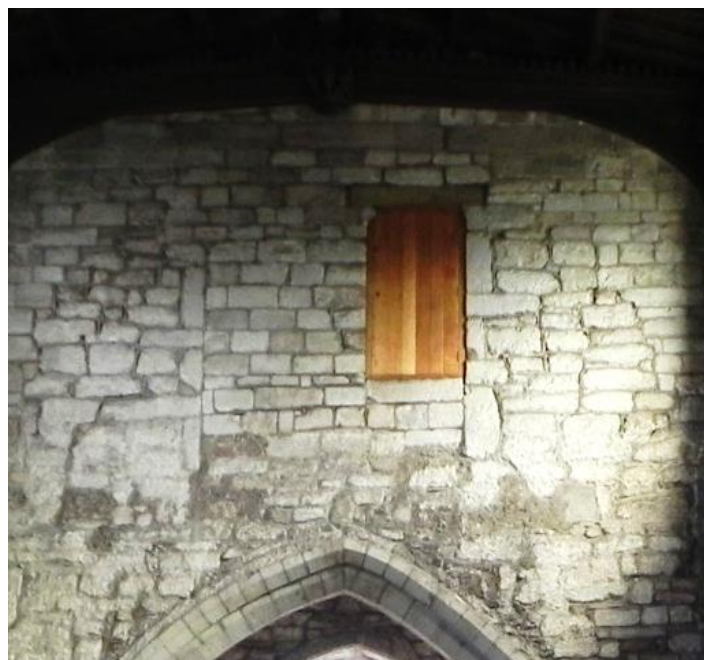
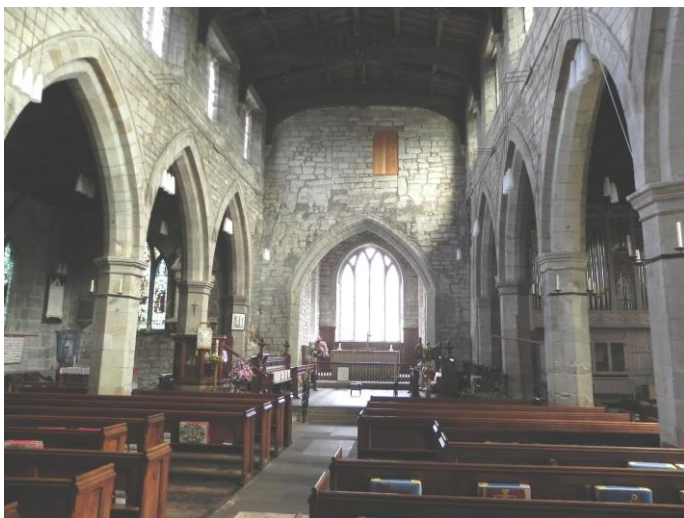
Derby Museum:

At the June meeting, Rachel Atherton of Derby Museum explained the situation with the Repton artefacts found during Professor Biddle's archaeological digs and offered the chance to complete the listing process to any willing volunteers. Margaret and Andy Austen and Chris Wardle are involved in this now for a few hours each week and Shelagh Wain has gone on to labelling the pottery finds from the recent TARG dig in Ticknall. The listing process is painfully slow and the maximum we have done is 33 entries in 3 hours – usually less. The problem is that the MODES system is a clunky XML database in Northern Ireland and every record involves getting 3 or 4 transactions across the Council network, through the link to NI, accessing the database and then waiting for the information to come back to us. Just over half our time is spent waiting for the system to work. This should all change in the not too distant future as the museum has funding for a new and more efficient system. There are 1600 records to sort out and so far we have done 219. At this rate it's an 18 month project.

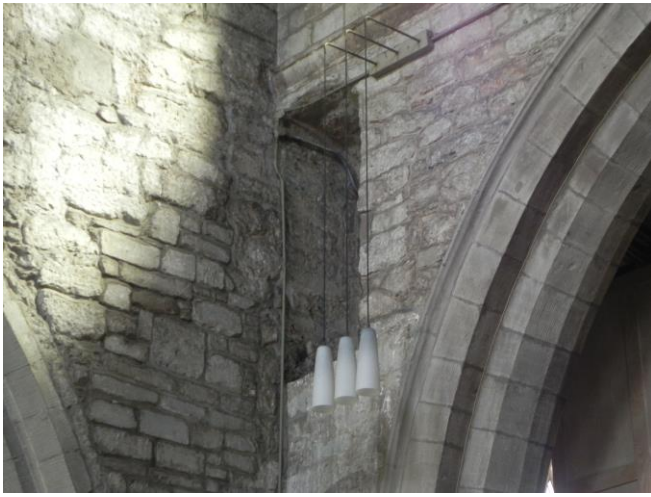
Chancel Loft – again:

In the last issue we described how we had been allowed into the previously inaccessible roof space over the chancel and found clear evidence that the ceiling joists had been raised and were possibly once floor joists. We said that the heritage archaeologist thought that this elevation took place in the 1700s, but in fact he said 17th century – the 1600s.

Lack of space prevented us from showing the “enigmatic door” high in the chancel wall and visible from the nave. We correct that here. Its origins are not clear and all the more interesting because looking back from beyond the altar rail, it is invisible.



It can be seen that the door is actually in a much larger opening later blocked up. The long vertical and horizontal stones that edged the opening are apparently typical Anglo-Saxon structure. Cutaways in the stone work strongly suggest that in front of this opening was a Rood Loft (or gallery, screen or beam). This would have carried the Rood (Cross) which was usually flanked by carved and decorated figures of Mary and St John. Beyond the opening could have been a floored room – the current ceiling



joists are certainly plenty big enough. There is an opening in the east corner of the south wall of the nave which could have provided access to the gallery, itself being reached by stone or wooden steps – now gone. If the current pointed arch was inserted later, the large opening would have had to be filled in to provide strength, and the small door would have provided access.

When the floor was raised to become the ceiling of the chancel, the bottom of the small door was visible from the altar rail and so it was bricked up with stone to hide it. However access was still needed – if only to let the roofers out when they had finished flaunching the laths to seal them against the weather. So the door remained.

In England when Henry VIII established the Anglican Church, it was decreed that the Rood and everything else above the rood beam had to be removed. The Rood Loft or gallery would previously have been used for preaching and sometimes for singing and would have held candles for use on festival days. With the banishment of the Rood the purpose of the room behind it may have been diminished and a decision taken to elevate the ceiling of the chancel. That would make sense if the decision was taken to enlarge the arch to its current pointed shape that matches the rest of the church. This would not have been a cheap exercise and Prof Eric Fernie would no doubt want to associate the work with some notable religious event. The Priory was dissolved in 1538 so it is likely to be later than that. It would be interesting to look in the Parish Records that survive to see if there are any expenses or major events mentioned.

Medieval Priory Mill:

We have now completed 7 resistivity pseudo-sections across the lower paddock. These are measurements of electrical resistance up to 4 or 5 metres underground along the line of the survey. It's like digging a trench and looking at the strata in its side wall – but looking at resistance values not the soil levels. However, the resistance can give a very good indication of soil type.

In the first four sections that we did, we decided that we could see 3 channels running across the field to the Old Trent Water (then the main channel of the river). They all seem to start from a common point near Brook End where it is recorded that the brook once entered the field. One channel is very wide and roughly where we know the Priory fish ponds were, one to the west running diagonally across the field which could have been the mill leet, and a third, smaller channel that ran farther west still and headed directly to where the kitchens and Necessarium (latrines) would have been. In one of the historical texts on Repton there is reference to a culvert being uncovered which may have taken waste water to the Old Trent, but we have to find the reference again.

The 5th section was short and at right angles running north from the Brook End wall and designed to help us understand the low resistance crescent we got on our earlier grid survey. We are still contemplating that one. The 6th and 7th were either side of the 1st team cricket pitch and intended to help confirm the channels, but they haven't done that very clearly.

Barbara Foster has turned up a document where Thacker at the hall accuses John Harper and William Bull of damaging the leet so the mill won't work effectively and implying that people were taking their corn to Harper's mill instead. We have seen other similar documents, accusing Harper of diverting the brook and we have interpreted that as diverting it to power his own mill. However there has never been any indication of another mill close to the Old Trent. Some of the documents accuse Harper of abusing the "custom of suite and grist". This is a monopoly covering a given area and granted to someone building a mill to ensure they get a return on their investment – otherwise no one would build mills. So it is perhaps better to think of Harpers mill being elsewhere in the village (Mill Hill or even Milton?) and the diversion a means of ruining his established competitor.

New item for our bookstall:

Just to let you know that we have re-published the Repton Historical Map as an A5 postcard. This follows a request for a small version from the post office and the bright idea of putting a postcard outline on the back. It costs no more to send but offers much more space for the message.

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.