

A History of the Saxon Church



at Corhampton
in the Meon Valley, Hampshire

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The Church with no name

The church at Corhampton on the west bank of the River Meon was built in 1020 AD, in a royal estate of the West Saxons and during the reign of Canute, King of England (1016-1035). Canute's capital was in Winchester 10 miles to the west across the South Downs.

The Church, a grade 1 listed building, has remained largely unchanged as a centre for the community and of Christian worship for nearly 1000 years.

The church is remarkable for the fact that it is one of a handful of churches not having a titular dedication e.g. the name of a saint. Churches of the late Saxon era (there were about twenty in the Meon Valley) were built under the patronage of the lord of the local Manor. This lord would have the right to choose to whom the church would be dedicated. As far as is known the church at Corhampton has never had such a dedication.¹

The Origin of the name ‘Corhampton’

Bede, a monk from Northumbria, wrote in the 8th century about the Provincia Meonwarorum, the Province of the Meonwara. The Meonwara² were the ‘people of the Meon’. Bede refers to the hamlet of Cornhampton referring to the settlement on the west bank of the Meon in which corn was milled and traded.

The Domesday Book³ (1086) does not include a reference to Cornhampton. It does however refer to the parish of Quedementune, considered by historians to be Corhampton; it is listed under Hugh de Port's possessions. There is however no mention of a church which is strange as it is considered to pre-date the Domesday Book.

The Church at Corhampton is one of the oldest churches in use as a place of Christian worship in England. It pre-dates the Norman cathedral in Winchester and most medieval cathedrals except those at Canterbury, Hereford, Litchfield, Rochester, Worcester, and York, some of which have subsequently been largely re-built.

In the later mediaeval era the hamlet was known as Cornhamptone. About two hundred years ago it seems to have been called Carmenton, which probably should be Carneonton. The suffix ‘ton’ is Saxon for an enclosure; ‘car’ (of Celtic derivation) means fortress. This possibly reflects the fact that the church is built on a mound and may have been a fortified last line of defence for the community which it served.

Another possible origin for the name of the hamlet is found in volume II of ‘Hampshire Notes and Queries’ (Published in 1884 by A. V. & B.A. Walters) which suggests that Carneonton "would indicate a town on the Meon at the Carrs". Carr means an association of trees and shrubs developing at edges of swamps or fens. This is a potentially fitting description of the location of the church on the bank of the Meon.⁴

Who were the people who lived in Corhampton in the 11th Century?

As mentioned above Bede wrote in the 8th century about the Meonwara the ‘people of the Meon’. After the Roman army left Britain in 410AD the country was initially populated and ruled by the Romano-British who retained ties to the Christian church. However when the Saxons and neighbouring Germanic tribes (Jutes, Angles and Friesians) crossed the North Sea during the 5th century they brought with them non-Christian beliefs and customs.

Wilfrith (known to us as Wilfrid; c.633 – c.709) an English bishop born to a noble family, and contemporary of Cuthbert of Lindisfarne in the northern Saxon kingdom of Northumbria, came south and is credited with the conversion of the Southern Saxons to Christianity. He had fallen out with his Northumbrian contemporaries and was imprisoned by Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury. He escaped to Sūþseaxna rīce the kingdom of the South Saxons (modern day Sussex) and from there to the Isle of Wight and to the province of the Meonwara.

Wilfrid was probably responsible for the building of a number of mud and wattle churches in the Valley. There were about 30 villages and churches in the Valley at the time that Bede wrote his Historia. These churches were replaced by stone structures around 1000 by which time Christianity was firmly established, parish boundaries had been laid out, and the building of permanent churches was possible. Only the church at Corhampton (built in 1020 AD, 300 years after Bede’s Historia and replacing an earlier Church) survives from the Saxon era. Other post-Conquest Churches in the Valley are built on, or close to, sites of Saxon Churches. Some have links to the Saxon era; such as the Saxon ‘four tides’ sundial at Warnford, part of the tower at Titchfield and the site of the Saxon Church in the graveyard of the current church at West Meon.

For more information on Bishop Wilfrid and his mission to convert the southern Saxons to Christianity see “In the Steps of St Wilfrid, the Meon Valley Pilgrimage Trail” at

www.wilfrid-meon-pilgrimage.co.uk and

www.earlybritishkingdoms.com/adversaries/bios/wilfred.html.



In addition to the churches there are also several sites in the Valley, at Droxford, Meonstoke and West Meon, where archaeological excavations have revealed Saxon cemeteries or settlements.

For seven centuries or more (until, and after, the Norman Conquest in 1066) the Saxons developed the Meon as a fertile farming valley running from the South Downs at East Meon to the Solent at Titchfield Haven. Trading vessels navigated the Meon, a Celtic (ancient British) word meaning 'Swift One', the name now of one of our local ales! From the Solent the ships reached as far as Droxford Mill, taking flour and other agricultural produce to the Solent and the trading ports of Hamwic (Southampton) and Portesmuða (Portsmouth). Saxons also traded in goods from other parts of our Islands, across what we now know as Europe and as far as Asia. A hoard of Saxon gold and silver discovered in Staffordshire in 2009 illustrates the extent of Saxon trading. An amateur enthusiast using a metal detector discovered "the Staffordshire Hoard". The hoard includes amazingly crafted artefacts dating back to the 6th century with red garnets from as far away as India and Sri Lanka.

The name of our nation (or Englalund as it was first known), derives from people known as Angles who also came from what is now Denmark. The people who settled in the Meon Valley were from the same part of Northern Europe; they were Jutes and Saxons. These Germanic peoples were amongst waves of people crossing Europe in what we now call the 'age of migrations'. The settlers in Englalund, displacing the Celtic Britons, became collectively known as the Anglo-Saxons or simply Saxons.

The Saxons, under King Alfred and his successors with their thrones at Winchester, laid the foundation of the English nation and language, our culture, religion, system of government, the layout of our villages and our landscape.

Location and history of the church

The maps show the location of the church at Corhampton on the west bank of the river Meon and close to the villages and later medieval churches of Exton, Meonstoke and Droxford. The church is located immediately adjacent to, and to the south of, the site of a mill, the possible origin of the first part of name of the



Maps showing location of the saxon church at Corhampton

hamlet. In the 11th century the mill would have been accessible from the coast (and the trading port of Hamwic (now Southampton) via a wider, fast flowing River Meon, navigable at least as far as Droxford, one mile to the South.

The church appears to have been built on an artificial mound, possibly the 'car' or fort mentioned above. It is rare for a Christian church to be so built and one suggestion is that it may stand on the site of a pre-Christian temple of Roman or even earlier times which were sometimes built on such mounds. Although there is no documentary evidence of this a Roman settlement was discovered in the 1930s (during road widening and diversion) just a few hundred yards to the north of the church at Corhampton. It is on two adjacent farms in the neighbouring villages of Exton and Meonstoke. A section of the façade of a Roman building from this site, excavated in the 1980s, is now in the British Museum

(www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/pe_prb/s/fa%C3%A7ade_from_a_roman_building.aspx)

Confirmation of the rich Saxon heritage of the Meon Valley was discovered during the excavation of the Roman settlement. This led to the discovery also of a Saxon settlement and cemetery.⁵

There is a unique and unusual connection between the church at Corhampton and the Roman era. A Roman coffin, pre-dating the church by seven centuries, is in the church yard at Corhampton.

The Roman coffin in the graveyard as it appears in 2013



The origin of this historical anomaly is recorded by a Charles E Mitchell in the following extract from a letter dated 1973 to his cousin Helen Mitchell (who called him 'Uncle Ed') who still lives in Corhampton.

"Here are the details so far as I can remember about the coffin found in the field at the Grinch as we call it which our Grandfather Charles Mitchell rented and later owned from the Campbell Wyndham Longs Estate, Corhampton House Park etc, farms. It appears that your father Albert Mitchell and others whom my grandfather employed were fencing off part of the field on the brow when the crowbar they were using struck something hard, after probing around they decided to dig the earth away that is how they found the coffin. I don't know who they contacted about it, but I suppose it was either the Rector of Meonstoke or the Vicar of Corhampton.

"In either case there was quite a lot to do about it- I remember my mother writing to me in Canada and telling me that the stone coffin and lead lining were taken up and taken to Corhampton Church but the body or skeleton were put in a wooden coffin and buried in Corhampton Churchyard and I think I am right in saying that the Bishop of Winchester was there and took part in the service. I don't know the date but I think it was in 1912 and that it was all reported in the Hampshire Chronicle. I have no doubt that they have a record of it. My Grandfather's name was Charles Mitchell. I have an idea there must have been a large house on the brow of this field and he was buried in the grounds of that House. There could have been a Roman settlement there."

However, if the mound dates to the Roman period it would be usual to find artefacts from this or earlier periods when graves were being dug; none has been recorded.

The northern part of the churchyard is partly circular, which is a Saxon characteristic and this is clearly visible in the drawing of the church that appears in an article on Corhampton Church in the Builders Journal of February 11th, 1903.

Peter des Roches, Bishop of Winchester in the reign of King John (1199-1216) gave the church at Corhampton to the Premonstratensian Abbey at Titchfield,⁶ 11 miles to the south

in the Meon Valley. The Premonstratensian canons served the church at Corhampton up to the time of the 'Dissolution of the Monasteries' by Henry VIII in the 16th century.

In 1545, the village of Lomer (now part of the Preshaw estate a few miles from Corhampton), was deserted; the church there fell into ruins and its parish was joined to Corhampton. From the Reformation until 1926 it had its own priest. In 1926 it joined with the parish of Meonstoke whose church is less than ¼ mile across the river. It was at this time, too, that Corhampton and Meonstoke became part of the diocese of Portsmouth, which was created, together with Guildford, out of the over-large diocese of Winchester.

Immediately across the A32 stands the Old Vicarage, attached to which used to be a Free School. Sir Nicholas Hyde, the celebrated Chief Justice of the Kings Bench who died in 1631, received part of his education at this school. In 1669, William Collins vested it in trust for the use of a master (the intention being that this should be the incumbent) on condition that he taught eight free scholars, three from Corhampton, two each from Meonstoke and Droxford and one from Exton. These scholars used trays of sand in lieu of slates or paper as writing materials. In 1816 it became a National School and closed around 1900.

Families in Corhampton and neighbouring villages still benefit from William Collins' legacy. A charity in his name was set up in the seventeenth century in Corhampton to provide for the education of children in the parish. The original endowment now provides an annual income which is managed by a number of locally-recruited trustees to provide financial help for the education of young people.

Construction of the church and the history of its restoration

It was during the reign of Canute that the church at Corhampton was built. Arthur and Phyllis Green in 'Saxon Architecture & Sculpture in Hampshire' (1951) date the church to the first quarter of the eleventh century and probably before 1020. For economic reasons, the church was constructed of whole flints, locally available and cheap, which were plastered over. It consisted of a nave and chancel. The walls are remarkably thin (only 2' 6", 76cm) as Saxon walls often were. These were strengthened by stone quoins in typical Saxon long-and-short work as well as by vertical pilaster strips or lesenes surmounted by a horizontal string course of wrought stone.⁷ This is typically Saxon. The stone came from the Isle of Wight, either from Binstead or Quarr, and was shipped up the then navigable river Meon.

The church at Corhampton has survived substantially unaltered. There has been the addition of a porch, a couple of buttresses, and the vestry-cum-boiler room all of which were added late in the 19th century. One major structural change was required in the mid-19th century when the east end of the church collapsed. The original had a large round window depicted in the water colour referred to above, a copy of which is hanging on the gallery in the church. The collapse of the East Wall in 1842 was a result of road widening when the mound was dug into and the foundations weakened. This was probably not the turnpike road, now the A32, which crosses the river at the Church; this road was probably not in existence at that time. It

was more likely to be an earlier road, which ran to the west of the river towards Exton at Exton Farm. Some of this is now a footpath and some the road through the village of Exton which was by-passed by the now A32 in the 1930s. A pen-and-ink drawing of 1908 in 'Highways and Byways of Hampshire' (D H Moutray Read) shows a wide muddy track passing close to the north and west side of the church.

The incident of the collapse of the east wall is unusual because, although ancient buildings have suffered much from traffic and road widening in recent decades, it was a rare occurrence in the mid-19th century. The collapse necessitated its rebuilding on the original foundations. This was executed rather clumsily in red brick and not in keeping with the original Saxon construction.

The ancient yew tree

The most notable feature of the exterior of the church is a gigantic yew tree, one of the finest and oldest examples that is still thriving. There is no way of dating a tree without cutting it down and counting its rings. The yew at Corhampton is still full of life and its branches spread at about a ½ inch (1.25 cm) per annum. A yew tree at Merdon Castle, 5 miles southwest of Winchester, had a girth of 22'9" (6.9 metres) and was growing on a pre-Conquest bank. The girth of the Corhampton Yew is 23' (7 metres) so we can say with some confidence that it was planted about 1000 years ago and may even pre-date the church. A similar yew tree at Alton Priors in Wiltshire has been dated to be 800 years older than the Norman church to which it is adjacent. This has led some historians to suggest that churches were built next to ancient trees rather than vice versa. Apart from the yew tree already referred to, there are some interesting arched brick graves. Towards the road there is also the Roman coffin, referred to earlier.



The ancient yew tree at the church at Corhampton

The exterior Architecture and perspective of the Church

To the left of the porch is probably the best preserved of the pilaster strips or Iesenes surmounted by the stone string course. Of particular interest is the treatment to the base; a stone carved as a group of three scrolled leaves or brackets. Continuing to the left and passing the Victorian buttress is the original west wall of the church, complete with the long-and-short quoins on the south-west and north-west corners, the central pilaster strip, and the string course above.

It is possible to discern two Saxon windows which were filled-in and then unblocked in restoration work carried out in 1905.

There is a small belfry added in the last century and completely rebuilt in 1999 to house the two church bells. One, the treble, is inscribed "1619 I.H. in God is my hope." and the second, by Thomas Mears, is dated 1829.

Continuing on to the north side of the church is the wall of the original nave with windows inserted in later medieval times; there is also the Victorian vestry. Of particular interest is the blocked north doorway. It has a semi-circular head and is cut straight through the wall without any projections, just a plain rib all round it on the outside. Where the arch springs from the uprights the capitals are stones carved rather unusually in horizontal rolls. Above the arch a pilaster runs up to the roof. There is a lancet window of the thirteenth century inserted into the masonry, so the doorway must have been blocked then if not earlier. The bases of the uprights are interesting; they "are of the same shape as the ends of a gold altar cross, being presented by King Canute to the New Minster in Winchester as shown by the New Minster Registry of about 1020 A.D. and on the capitals and bases of the arcade at the foot of the same illumination" (Arthur R. & Phyllis M. Green 'Saxon Architecture & Sculpture in Hampshire' (1951)) At the base is the original stone plinth on which the church was built; this is a rare occurrence.

On the south-east corner of the nave the long-and-short quoins are evident. There is also another pilaster strip on the chancel wall.

Immediately to the right of the porch is an extremely interesting carved stone set into the wall. This is a Saxon sundial divided into 8 "tides" rather than 12 hours which is what would be represented in a modern-day sundial.

There are curious bulbous objects at the end of each tide, and the hole in the centre for the gnomon (that would have cast the shadow) is visible. The dial is a reddish brown stone quite different from any other stone in the church, pre-dating the present building and maybe even dating back to Wilfrid's time. It is one of the best preserved Saxon sundials in the England.



The original Saxon sundial

The Saxon chancel arch

The dominant feature inside the Church is the perfect, complete classic Saxon chancel arch. It is typically very simple in design and construction. There are pilaster strips up the side and very plain capitals; those on the north side have been repaired. All the stones that form the arch run right through from side to side.



The classic Saxon arch

The arch is similar to the chancel arch at Holy Trinity Church in Bosham, twenty miles south east on the shore of Chichester Harbour. The Bosham arch is featured in the Bayeux Tapestry. Harold Godwinson, Earl of Wessex and future King of England, is depicted in 1064 (40 years after the church at Corhampton was built and two years before the Battle of Hastings) visiting the church at Bosham, where he then lived. He was about to set sail as the envoy of King Edward the Confessor, to meet his (Harold's) nemesis, William Duke of Normandy.



The Bayeux Tapestry representation of the Saxon arch at the church at Bosham in West Sussex

It was at this fateful meeting that Harold is reputed to have sworn an oath to support William's claim to be the next king of England after Edward's death. Another panel of the Bayeux Tapestry shows Harold swearing a sacred oath on the bones of a saint. Visitors to le Musée de la Tapisserie de Bayeux will, in addition to the original Bayeux

Tapestry, experience a model of a 'typical' English Domesday (therefore late Saxon) village. This is the village of East Meon, near the source of the river Meon and just seven miles from the church at Corhampton. The village of Cornhampton, or Quedementune as it was recorded in the Domesday survey commissioned at Winchester in 1086 by William who was then King of England, may have also been similar to the one that is represented by the model at Bayeux.



A model of the village of East Meon a 'typical English Domesday village'

People wishing to experience the elegant and creative embroidered narrative depicted by the Bayeux Tapestry can do so at a full size authentic replica, on permanent exhibition at the museum of Reading, just forty miles to the North of Corhampton.

The Wall Paintings

"The real importance of the chancel scheme is that it is the most elaborate decorative scheme that survives in English Romanesque painting."

Francis Wormald (1904-1972), Professor of history and of liturgical and Anglo-Saxon illuminated medieval painting; and of Palaeography. King's College, University of London.

Corhampton church is particularly renowned for the paintings on either side of the sanctuary. The insertion of windows and the collapse in 1842 of the east end of the church damaged these remarkable works of medieval art. They were uncovered in 1968 and restored with a grant from the Pilgrim Trust. This work was conducted by a team led by Eve Baker who, with her husband, the painter and potter Professor Robert Baker, were regarded as amongst the most eminent conservators of wall paintings and limestone sculpture in the 20th century. The Eve Baker Trust now exists to support the

preservation and conservation of historic wall paintings, sculpture and other works of creative expression as well as the advancement of education and research in these fields.

The eastern end of the south wall depicts the story of a miracle attributed to Swithun, Bishop of Winchester 852-865 AD. Swithun was inspecting the building of the bridge over the Itchen in Winchester; on the site of the present bridge at the City Mill, near King Alfred's statue. There was a large crowd and an elderly woman, bringing her eggs to sell in the market, was jostled. The basket was knocked out of her hands and the eggs broke. The eggs can clearly be seen in the picture falling to the ground. Swithun is shown restoring the eggs to their original state.



Wall painting of the story of the St Swithun and the miracle of the eggs

The Riverside Players, our local theatrical group, have created and performed at Corhampton Church, a puppet story of St Swithun and the broken eggs; video and photographic extracts from this remarkable performance can be seen on the Saxons in the Meon Valley website - www.saxonsinthemeonvalley.org.uk/saxonschoolday2013



The Meon Valley Riverside Players and their puppets performing the story of St Swithun and the miracle of the eggs for local 'Saxon' children from Meonstoke and Droxford Schools

Next to the story of the eggs is the depiction of two men, their head covered by newer plaster. The men are carrying something that looks like a stretcher. This is thought to represent the story of a young man who was frightened by two wild women and fell into the River Itchen. Taken out as dead he was placed beside the tomb of Swithun, where after three days, he was restored to life.

There is also a depiction of a rearing horse; there is no known story related to this.

The scenes on the north side are not decipherable.

Underneath these scenes of the life of Swithun are some unusual features making use of heraldic symbolism. First a beautiful border with a lozenge riband pattern in red and green. Below this are elaborately painted representations of loose hangings and drapes, very rare indeed for so early a period, with further patterning framing two large square medallions. The one on the north, which is hard to make out, represents lions couchant, while the one on the south has two addorsed (back to back) doves with their heads turned round to look at each other.

What is the date of these paintings? It is just possible, but very unlikely, that they could be Saxon. They could be as late as 1225. However most experts believe now that they date from the middle of the 12th century, probably between 1125 and 1175.

In the nave there are traces of other wall-paintings in somewhat poorer condition. In 1968 Eve Baker also uncovered these paintings. The New Testament story of Christ's 'Agony in the Garden' is depicted on the north wall. The one on the south side of the chancel arch probably depicts the story in the Old Testament book of Genesis of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.

Other features of the church interior

here was a sensitive restoration of the church in 1905-6; the pews date from this restoration. The fine nave roof, probably dating back to around 1600, was uncovered and also restored at this time. The pulpit is Jacobean, though on a modern base. Some panelling on the right hand side of the entrance to the church, forming the back of a pew, and the lectern, either date from this time, too, or are good copies executed at the time of the 1906 restoration.

All the woodwork in this restoration was carved by local craftsmen and was probably paid for by a member of the Campbell Wyndham family to whom reference is made in the previously quoted Helen Mitchell correspondence. The Campbell Wyndham family memorials are on the south wall of the church. They lived in Corhampton House, just a short distance from the church, and were almost certainly responsible for its restoration in 1905-6.

The other family with strong connections to the church, and whose memorials are on the north wall, were the Longs of Preshaw, which is 4 miles to the West and now in the adjacent parish of Exton.

Almost all the windows were inserted in the thirteenth century. This was to provide more light in the church and somewhat altered the original architecture and fabric. This is particularly noticeable in the chancel.

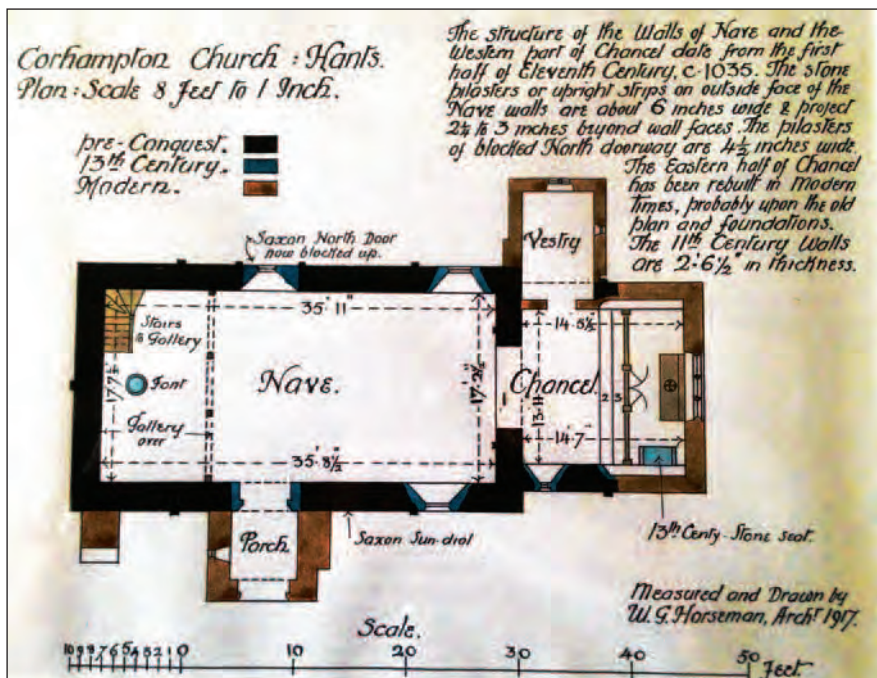
At the west end there is a gallery dating probably to 1837 and erected to house singers and musicians. Local legend recalls the numbers of selected hymns and psalms were exhibited on a slate hung over the front of the gallery. One fateful Sunday morning no slate was hung out. The parish clerk, not noticing the omission, said "Let us sing the -----"; after a pause he repeated "Let us sing the ---" until, grasping the situation, he shouted in sonorous tones "Where be th' slaat?"

The gallery comes to life particularly when the Hampshire based choir, the Athanasian Consort, performs sacred music from the late medieval period.

In 1857, the charming little chamber organ (still in use today) was presented by Mrs. Campbell-Wyndham. This organ is still in use and was hand pumped until 1976. Originally installed in the parish church of Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, it was found to be too small and sold to Mrs. Campbell-Wyndham. Apart from the blower, its specification is as it was built.

Below the gallery is the font, which is difficult to date. Some of the details are Norman, but others, such as the roll-moulding, are Saxon. So this is probably an example of Saxon-Norman overlap.

Hanging on the gallery are two interesting pictures. The right hand one is a plan of the church drawn in 1917 by the architect S. C. Horseman which shows the different architectural periods of the church very clearly, and the other is a delightful watercolour of the outside of the church before the East end fell down, and was painted by the Rev. Charles Waters who was Rector from 1834 -1848.



Drawing dated 1917 showing the development of the Church over 900 years



*Water colour of the church at Corhampton c 1840;
(The round stained glass window, is unlikely to date to when the church was built in 1020AD)*

Beyond the small chancel are 17th century altar rails; beyond, in the sanctuary on the left there is an altar stone. This is almost certainly the original Saxon one which was thrown out when the east end was reconstructed in 1842 and languished under the yew tree until reinstated in its present position in the restoration of 1905-6. This altar stone is particularly interesting as, in addition to the usual five consecration crosses on the top, it has an extra one in the middle of the long side.

Opposite this altar stone is a large stone chair probably in its original position. It is difficult to be certain about its age but it could be Saxon, though more likely later. It is a sanctuary chair, in Old English a Fridstol or Freed Stool; a chair of peace or freedom denoting that here a refugee could find sanctuary and peace. A person sitting in the chair could not be arrested. These chairs serve a similar purpose as the iron rings or sanctuary knockers sometimes seen on church doors.

New life for the Saxon Church at Corhampton

he story in this history is the story of the church built at Corhampton built in 1020AD, in the late Saxon era and in the reign of Canute. It is one of the oldest places of Christian worship in England and has served the community of the Meon Valley for a thousand years.

The Church at Corhampton continues to offer inspiration and opportunities for celebration of our Saxon heritage.

In 1999, a quinquennial (five-yearly) inspection by architects appointed by the Church of England resulted in a requirement for significant repair work. The Friends of Corhampton Church was established under the chairmanship of Rear Admiral Guy Liardet from the neighbouring village of Meonstoke. The Friends subsequently became a registered charity (registration number 1073337) *“to assist in the restoration and maintenance of the fabric, contents and churchyard of Corhampton Church ...and to preserve and protect it as a place of Christian Worship”*. The initial challenge was to raise £110,000 from its embryonic membership base and from English Heritage to address the requirements of the quinquennial inspection. This included re-tiling the roof, re-hanging the bells, installing new electrics, internal redecoration, repairs to the external stonework and improving the church yard.

The Friends continue to be the source of funds for maintaining the fabric of the church. In 2010 the Friends decided to explore, share and celebrate the Saxon heritage of which the church at Corhampton is a icon. The *“First Saxon Festival in the Meon Valley for 1000 years”* was held at the church in the summer of 2010 engaging local schools and heritage organisations; including Winchester Museum Services, Winchester Cathedral and Weorod. Weorod is a historical re-enactment and living history society that celebrates the life of the Meonwara, the people who lived in the Meon Valley during the Saxon era. Two hundred people of all ages from the immediate Meon Valley villages of Corhampton, Exton, Meonstoke and Droxford joined this celebration.

(see www.saxonsinthemeonvalley.org.uk/first-saxon-festival).

In 2010 the Friends also worked with the local schools at Meonstoke and Droxford to offer a Saxon learning day. This has now been established as an annual learning event at the

centre of which is the church and its history. The narrative, videos and photos of the 2013 event captures the excitement of the children, staff, parents and volunteers in this learning experience - www.saxonsinthemeonvalley.org.uk/saxonschoolday2013



'Saxon' Children of Meonstoke and Droxford schools celebrating the awesomeness of the ancient yew tree

The Friends also created other opportunities for celebrating and sharing the Saxon heritage of the Meon Valley and in 2012 were successful in attracting a Heritage Lottery 'all our stories' grant to 'bring to life the story of the Saxons in the Meon Valley'. The programme was launched in February 2013 at a meeting attended by over seventy people representing the ten villages of the Meon Valley and a growing group of heritage partners. The Saxon story and its celebration

are brought to life on the Friends' newly launched 'Saxons in the Meon Valley' website www.saxonsinthemeonvalley.org.uk

In April 2013 the AGM of the Friends confirmed its commitment to promoting the Saxon heritage through an addition to its constitution which was subsequently accepted by the Charity Commission - "With Corhampton Saxon Church as the focus, the Friends will involve the local Community in the exploration of our Saxon Heritage"

This focus on our heritage will ensure that the Church at Corhampton will retain meaning and symbolism for today's and future generations in the Meon Valley.



'Saxon' Children of Meonstoke School ringing the bells of the Church'

Help preserve the Church at Corhampton and our Saxon heritage

embership of the Friends is open to all; a membership form is available at: www.saxonsinthemeonvalley.org.uk/the-friends-of-corhampton-saxon-church
Alternatively please send an email to the chairman of the Friends of Corhampton Church at liardet@meonstoke33.freeserve.co.uk.
Online donations can be made at <https://localgiving.com/charity/corhamptonchurch>

Acknowledgements

his history is based on an earlier version written by the Reverend John Hurst in the 1980s and updated and revised in 2000 by Chris Maxse, a member of the committee of the Friends of Corhampton Church. This version has been produced in October 2013 by Peter O'Sullivan who is also a member of the committee of Friends of Corhampton Church and the community leader of the Saxon heritage programme in the Meon Valley.

We are grateful to Helen Mitchell of Corhampton for sharing the correspondence from her uncle (to which this history refers) and her own memories of the Meon Valley and Corhampton Church.

We are also most grateful for the support given to the Friends of Corhampton Church and the Saxon programme from the local community, from our local schools and from the many heritage organisations and their staff who have given time, resources and creative energy to help us preserve, learn about and celebrate our heritage.

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References from the text

¹ It is the norm for Christian churches to have a titular dedication; this could be to the Blessed Trinity; Holy Spirit; Jesus Christ, his mother Mary, one of the angels or a saint inscribed in the Roman Martyrology. (Rite of Dedication of a Church and an Altar; English translation © 1978, International Committee on English in the Liturgy)

² ‘Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum’ (‘The Ecclesiastical History of the English People’); Bede AD 731.

³ The Domesday Book, now held at The National Archives, Kew, in South West London, is the record of the great survey of much of England and parts of Wales completed in 1086. The survey was executed for William I of England (William the Conqueror) twenty years after he took the English throne in 1066 following the defeat of Harold of Wessex and King of England at the Battle of Hastings “While spending the Christmas time of 1085 in Gloucester, William had deep speech with his counsellors and sent men all over England to each shire to find out what or how much each landholder had in land and livestock, and what it was worth” (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle). One of the main purposes of the survey was to determine who held what and what taxes had been liable under William’s Saxon predecessors. The book was known by the English as “Domesday”, that is the Day of Judgment.

⁴ For more information about the history of the village of Corhampton see a History of the County of Hampshire, vol 3; William page (ed) 1908 at: www.britishhistory.ac.uk/source.aspx?pubid=274

⁵ For more information about the Saxon heritage of the Meon Valley see www.saxonsinthemeonvalley.org.uk.

This is the website of a programme, funded by the Heritage Lottery and led by the Friends of Corhampton Saxon Church, to bring to life the story of the Saxons in the Meon Valley.

⁶ ‘Premonstratensians’ is the Order of Canons Regular of Prémontré; founded in 1120 at Prémontré near Reims in the Champagne-Ardenne region of France, by Norbert, who later became Archbishop of Magdeburg. For more information on Titchfield Abbey see www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/titchfield-abbey

⁷ A **quoin** is an architectural term for a masonry block at the corner of a wall. They exist in some cases to provide actual strength for a wall made with inferior stone or rubble and in other cases to make a feature of a corner, creating an impression of permanence and strength, and reinforcing the onlooker’s sense of a structure’s presence.

⁸ A **lesene** is an architectural term for a narrow, low-relief, vertical pillar in a wall; it does not have a base or capital.

