

## FRIENDS OF CORHAMPTON CHURCH



The sheer antiquity of Corhampton Saxon Church is hard to grasp. The Cluniac monk Raoul Glaber, who died in 1044, wrote about the terrible tenth century – as grim a time for Europe as any since. Invasions by Vikings from the north, Arabs from the south, Magyars from the east; peasant enslavement; famine – “mothers, forgetting their maternal love, ate their babes”; a “horrible plague - a hidden fire which, upon whatsoever limb it toned, consumed it”, now known to be ergot from corrupt rye bread – made everyone’s lives a misery. The year 1000 was thus seen as a significant spiritual milestone, Glaber writing: “So it was as though the very world had shaken herself and cast off her old age, and were clothing herself everywhere in a white garment of churches. Then indeed the faithful rebuilt and bettered almost all the cathedral churches, and other monasteries dedicated to divers saints, and smaller parish churches”.

Corhampton Saxon Church was part of this movement, built in stone (hence ‘white’) in 1020 and used as a place of worship ever since. Another perspective; King Henry the Seventh’s death was about half way between then and now.



Not surprising, then, that the Meonstoke PCC should recognise its responsibility and do its best to preserve this jewel with its Saxon architectural features, twelfth century wall paintings, and unique spiritual ambience.

In 1997 the church architect found that much work was needed to preserve the fabric. A restoration committee met first in January 1998 and studied the problem; could the parish afford to repair Corhampton and maintain it alongside St Andrew’s church, two hundred yards away? The alternative was dire; turn it over to the Redundant Churches Trust, padlocks, damp, dereliction?

*The organ loft viewed from the front of the nave*

Spirited fund-raising realised £110,000 that, *inter alia*, re-tiled the roof, sorted out the drains, re-furbished the windows, repaired external stonework, re-wired the whole building, de-pigeoned, re-decorated and, thanks to a donation from Miss Barbara Curtis, re-hung the bells.

But annual running costs still had to be met by a small parish with two churches totalling 1700 years in age. Thus was founded the Friends, an authorised charity, whose constitution states:

*“The Friends are established 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”.*

There are today 120 members who yearly contribute £1500 to the parish against running costs. Many improvements have been funded. Recently the Friends donated £1000 towards churchyard tree felling. An increasing sum on deposit is insurance against disaster. We run events of various sorts and the chairman issues a news sheet twice a year.



*The Saxon arch leading to the altar*