

Hartley Wintney St Mary - historical graffiti report

Hampshire Medieval Graffiti Survey



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Hampshire Medieval Graffiti Survey

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Brief History of St Mary's church, Hartley Wintney

The church is situated on a low hill within a large churchyard at what is now the southern edge of the village. The earliest part of the building is the small chancel, built partly of puddingstone rubble, probably dating to the 11th or early 12th century. The long nave has late 13th to early 14th century details, suggesting enlargement or rebuilding by the Cistercian nuns of nearby Wintney Priory, who owned the living from c1340. Traces of medieval wall paintings from the 13th to 15th centuries on the north wall of the nave include a large figure of St Christopher, and the Seven Deadly Sins. The growth of the village led to brick transepts being added in 1834, and a new stone and flint tower was built in 1842. An inscription high up on the tower records this as "T. Cooper Built 1842" (Cooper was the architect). In 1870 the parishioners moved to the new church of St John which was closer to the village centre and St Mary's became abandoned. It was declared redundant in 1975 and is now in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust.

Graffiti summary and discussion

Generally, most early graffiti in churches is found in the porch and around the entrance, and on pillars close to the main entrance. This graffiti is thought to have been made by those first entering the church, possibly as signs of private devotion. At St Mary's, of course, entry is now through the west door of the Victorian tower and there are no pillars. The siting of the St Christopher wall painting on the north wall of the nave suggests there may have originally been a south doorway opposite, but no trace of this remains. However, the doorway into the nave from the tower is 13th century, with a double-chamfered moulded archway which does have some graffiti around it. This consists of pairs of initials, and some possible dates although these are illegible as the stone surface is so abraded. Interestingly, and probably coincidentally, there are two examples of the initials IW, one each side of the archway (Figure 1) while just inside the nave, to the north side of the door, is the carefully incised name Israil Woodes (Figure 2). On the south side of the doorway are some larger shapes which look like Vs or a W, made of pairs of parallel lines (Figure 3). Some initials have rectangular boxes incised around them (Figure 4), and it is suggested (Champion, 2018) that these may have been made to commemorate individuals who could not afford a more expensive gravestone. There is one faint cross on the north side of the door arch, and more initials (Figure 5).

Other names and initials appear around the church in later contexts. These include the initials TJ on the exterior sill of the north transept window, EH on the west window on the south wall of the south transept (Figure 6), several initials outside on the tower buttresses, and several names and dates, the earliest being 1871, inside the bell chamber.

The largest amount of graffiti, dating from the 19th century onwards, is on the pews. Although often discounted as being by "naughty boys" this graffiti can provide a valuable resource for local history and family researchers. This survey did not record all the pew graffiti, but a few examples were photographed to show examples of sketches of figures, buildings, patterns, comments and names, some dated. For example, Pew 31 in the south transept gallery contains the names of H. Martin, A. Hester and C. Rex, two pencil signatures dated 1867 (Figure 7), the invocation to "Praise the Lord all ye people", and the tersely inscribed "HELL". Pew 25 includes the names TE Halsey, RH Turner, and W Bell, among others (Figure 8). We would suggest that the recording of the graffiti within the pews could be a productive community exercise, producing a useful resource for local historians and complementing the recent study of the gravestone inscriptions here.

Other graffiti recorded was made by those doing work on the building. Pencil calculations were found on a mullion of the south transept window (Figure 9) and also on the cupboard walls within the north transept, where the name Don Dicker was carefully written above the door in pencil (Figure 10). The hatchment in the south transept had the helpful comment “South Top” pencilled on the back, presumably made when it had had to be moved.

Marks which were made during the construction of the building were also recorded, although not officially “graffiti”. These included a number of arrow shapes on the stone blocks forming the course running round the tower, put on by masons as identifying or assembly marks (Figure 11). Strangely, arrow shapes were also found incised into the brickwork of the exterior west and east walls of the south transept (Figures 12 & 13), but the significance of these is unknown.

Inside the church, there were crosses on two adjacent stones on the east side of the chancel north window. These marks may have been made by masons rather than by worshippers in the church (Figure 14).

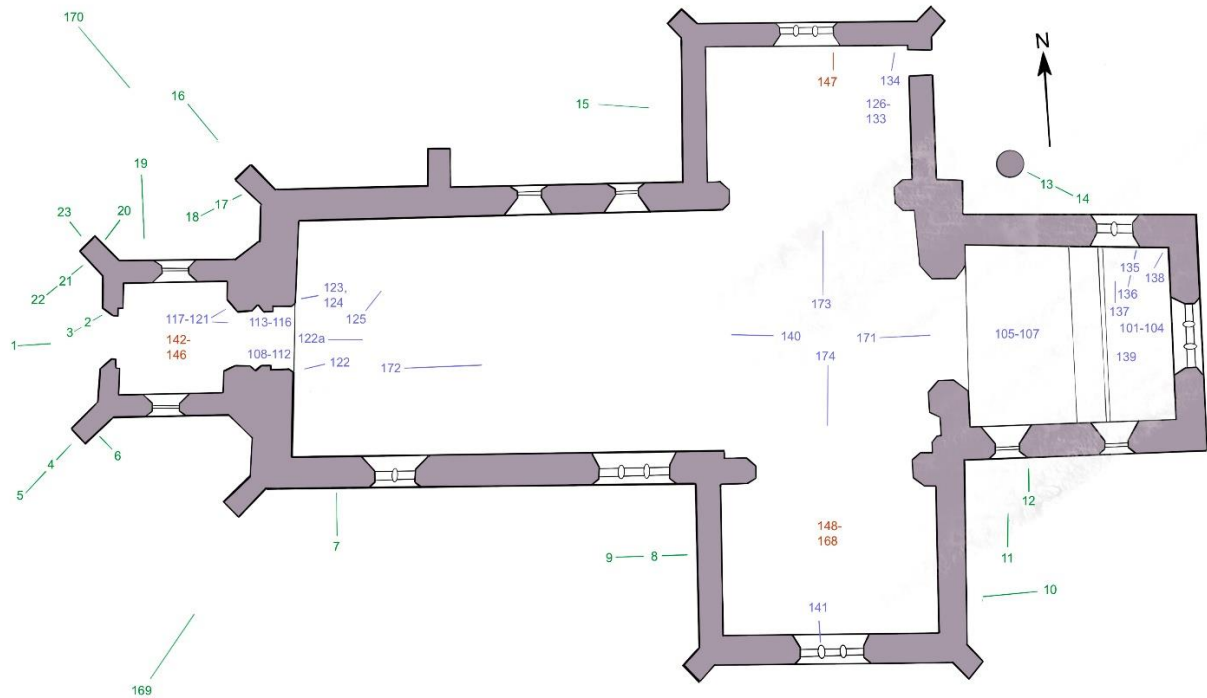
Carpenters’ assembly marks were seen on the timber framework within the bell chamber. The prayer table had 2 compass-drawn concentric circles incised into opposite corners, next to the scrolled volute details (Figure 15). Their identical locations suggest they relate to the marking out of the designs, although such patterns, when found incised on the fabric of buildings, are often thought to have an apotropaic or ritual protection function against evil. However, the context of these marks suggests a more prosaic explanation.

Finally, again not graffiti, but of historic interest, is the Ordnance Survey bolt benchmark on the northwest buttress, recorded on the OS six-inch map of 1897, as BM 287 (Figure 16).

Survey archive

A total of 97 photographs were taken during the survey. All images and record sheets are held by the Hampshire Field Club Medieval Graffiti Project archive and are available on request. A copy of this report has been lodged with the Hampshire Historic Environment Record.

SITE: St Mary's, Hartley Witney
 DATE: 25/09/2021
 GRAFFITI SURVEY: Photograph location plan
 GREEN: Exterior 1-23, 169, 170
 BLUE: Interior ground floor 101-141, 172-174
 RED: First floor tower and galleries 142-168



Plan to show location of photographs taken during survey

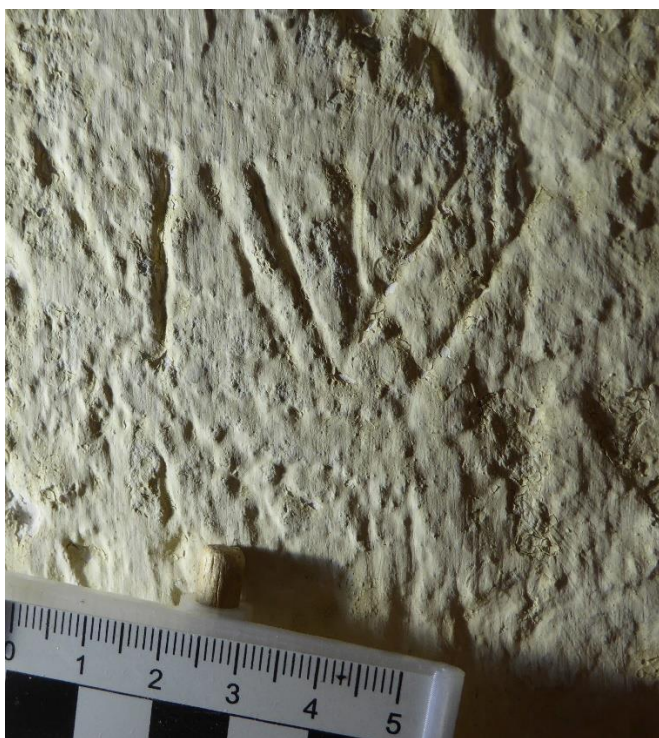


Fig 1 West doorway, south side. Initials IW. Photo 110



Fig 2 Nave, north side of doorway. Israil Woodes. Photo 124



Fig 3 West doorway, south side. V shapes. Photo 112



Fig 4 West doorway, boxed initials WW. Photo 111



Fig 5 West door arch, north side. Initials IK and J. Photo 03



Fig 6 South transept, south wall, west window. Initials EH. Photo 12



Fig 7 Pew 31. Signatures dated 1867 and initials. Photo 164



Fig 8 Pew 25. Names including TE Halsey, RH Turner, W Bell. Photo 167



Fig 9 South transept window mullion. Pencil calculations. Photo 141

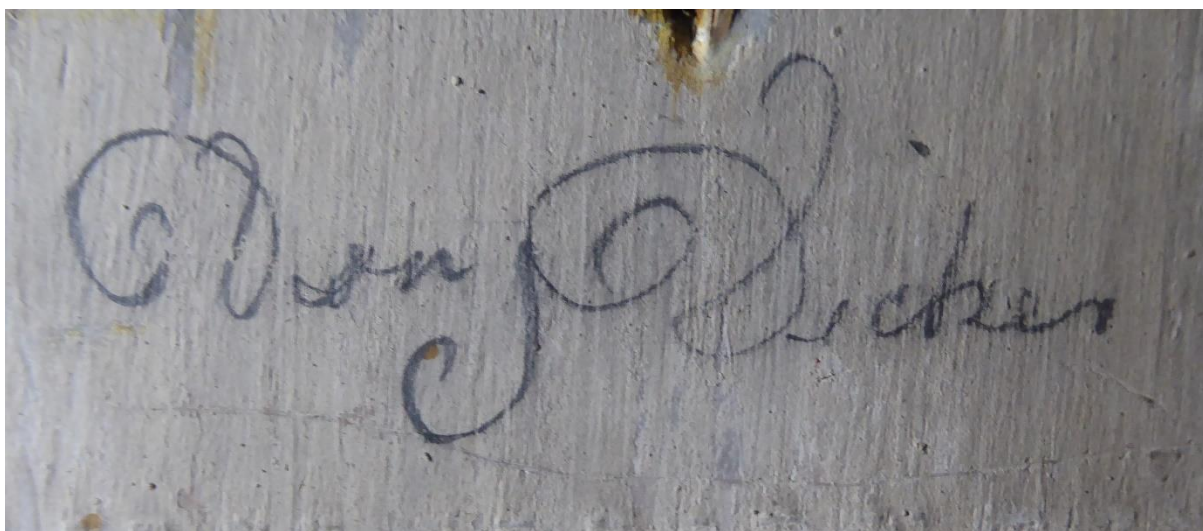


Fig 10 North transept cupboard. Pencil signature Don Dicker. Photo 126



Fig 11 Nave. North-west buttress. Arrow mark. Photo 17

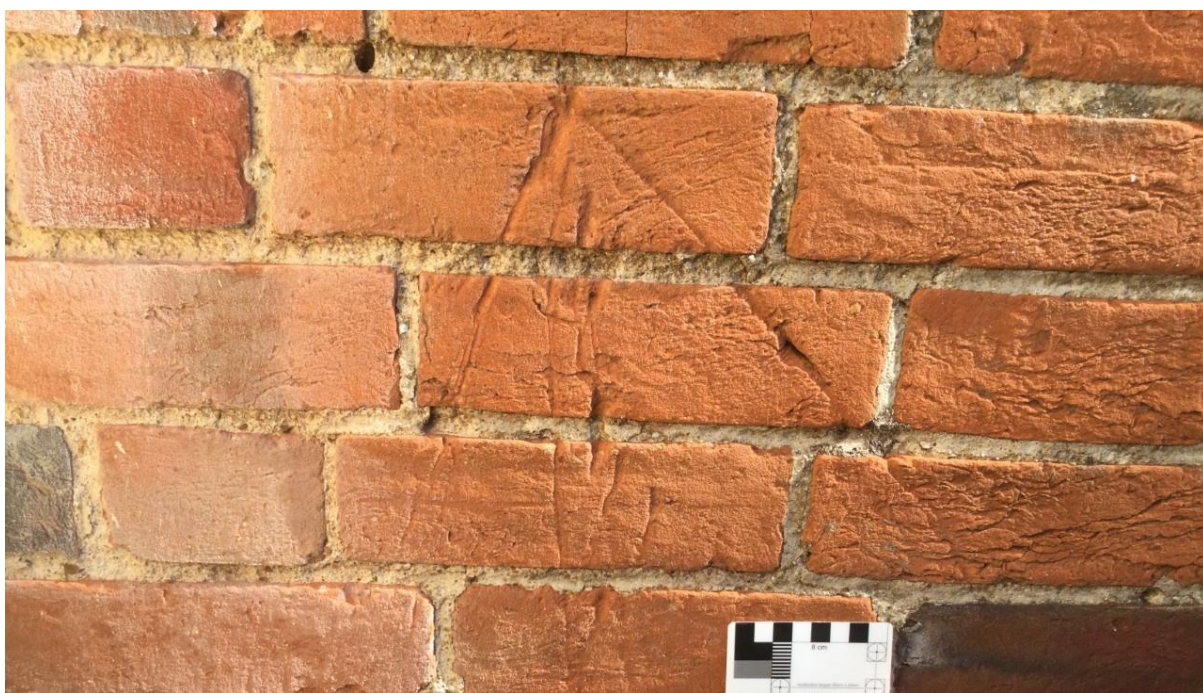


Fig 12 South transept, west wall. Arrow. Photo 08



Fig 13 South transept, east wall. Arrow. Photo 10



Fig 14 Chancel, north window, east side Cross, possible mason mark. Photo 136



Fig 15 Prayer table. Concentric circles marking out lines. Photo 139



Fig 16 Ordnance Survey six-inch map of 1897 showing benchmark location

Disclaimer

This document has been prepared for the titled project or named part hereof and should not be relied upon or used for any other project or assessment without the permission of the Hampshire Medieval Graffiti Project or the church.

References

Bullen M, Crook J, Hubbuck R, Pevsner N, (2010), *The Buildings of England, Hampshire: Winchester and the North*.

Champion M J, (2018), "Memory made solid: informal church monuments and graffiti", *Journal of the Church Monuments Society*, Vol XXXIII.

Gorsky David, (2003), "St Mary's Church, Hartley Wintney, Hampshire: The Church on the Hill", Hartley Wintney Parish Council.

Rushton, Neil, (2011), *Church of St Mary, Hartley Wintney, Hampshire*.

