

Upton Grey St Mary - historical graffiti report

Hampshire Medieval Graffiti Survey



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Brief History of St Mary's church, Upton Grey

The church is situated to the north of the village centre, close to where the Roman road from Chichester to Silchester ran through the parish. It sits on a rise above the road and is surrounded by its churchyard. A church is recorded at Upton Grey in the 1086 Domesday. It is built of local Malmstone.

The present church is an unusually shaped building, with a short early Norman nave and tall narrow Norman arch dated to approx. 1120. Between the nave and the chancel stands a tower. The tower and chancel are continuous with each other and along with the chancel arch, date from the C13th. They are set at an oblique angle to the nave with a deflection towards the south (see plan). It has been suggested that this deflection respects the footprint of the original church. This area of the church incorporates some early stonework indicating the possibility of an earlier church.

The nave is short in proportion to its width (it was shortened in the C15th) and formerly had a south aisle, traces of which can be seen in the south wall of the nave.

In 1690 there was a brick-built addition to the tower usefully dated on the east side.

The bell tower has a short staircase to the ringing chamber. Inside the chamber is a clock installed in 1761 and still striking the hours.

The brick-built north Hoddington Aisle was added in 1715 by John Limbrey who, at that time, held Hoddington Manor.

On the west wall of the nave are three consecration crosses dated to circa 1100 and revealed during the 1880 restoration of the church.

There is an early C14th inscription on the east wall of the nave. There has been much debate about it but the lettering is now thought to be early C14th and written in English. Translated it reads, 'For God's love beware of me'.

The C15th font of Caen stone stands midway in the nave on the north side. It has a lead-lined octagonal bowl with quatrefoiled panels and a slim, plain octagonal stem which sits upon a shaped base.

The church is entered through the south doorway protected by a Victorian porch.

Graffiti summary and discussion

Method

The survey of the church interior was undertaken in relatively bright natural light conditions. Initial identification of the graffiti was done visually with a raking light source. Each graffiti mark was recorded, using digital imagery, using both camera and iPad. Sometimes multiple images were taken using different angles of light source and camera. Field survey notes were recorded. Images were then transferred to a computer where further enhanced identifications were made and this detail along with the original field data was then collated in a spreadsheet. A total of 167 images were taken (some of them general views of locations within the church).

General remarks

Generally, most early graffiti in churches is found in the more public areas of a church. Areas around the porch and entrance and on pillars close to the main entrance are common areas to locate graffiti. Such graffiti is thought to have been made by those first entering the church, possibly as signs of private devotion. St Mary's no longer has the early south arcade or pillars however the area around the south doorway has a good collection of graffiti as does the chancel doorway, leading to the vestry, bell tower ringing chamber and font. The exterior brick west wall also has a significant collection of initials.

The church is mainly built from soft local Malmstone. This is relatively easy to carve but its softness also means degradation of marks is more likely. Some marks are too abraded to identify clearly.

Graffiti in detail

This report details the more significant graffiti marks found. Locations of the featured marks are shown on the church floor plan at the end of this report.

A survey of the **exterior of the church** revealed several pairs of initials carved into the brickwork of the west and north wall of the north aisle. These were carved mainly in the area around the west window (Figure 1) and going northwards to the NW corner.

These initials have been finely cut and would make an interesting community project to try and identify who they refer to. There are no dates to tell us if they were added when the aisle was constructed in 1715 although the height of these initials suggests this was the case. Initials include a group: TC, GC, SC, possibly representing members of one family. A TL may be one of the Limbrey family and there are several others to investigate: JA, WC, TD, AK, LS, IW, EW, TT, WM and EM. (Figure 2).

There is a well-defined cut mark benchmark towards the NW corner. (Figure 3). This is recorded on the 1897 Ordnance Survey map.



Fig 1. West wall window with initials WC and TD to either side of window. Photo KP12



Fig 2. Exterior west wall. Initials T.C, G.C, S.C, A.M. Photo KP10



Fig 3. External west wall. Cut mark benchmark and initials I.V. Photo KP13

Entry to the church is through the **C13th south doorway**. There are several graffiti marks around the doorway on both the blocks and mouldings. Various crosses including a calvary cross (Figure 4) and possible baptismal crosses (Figure 5) are in evidence. Although these are much degraded it is possible to make out the 8 points of the baptismal crosses. It is also possible to see that some of the graffiti is overlain by later inscriptions. On the east side is a pair of initials WA. (Figure 6).

On the west side of the doorway is an interesting mark that has a number of deep scratch marks across it. It could possibly be a hand but would need further work to verify this. Hands and feet or shoes may be considered devotional offerings (Champion, 2015). (Figure 7).

Whilst relatively common in some areas of the country such as East Anglia, Hampshire has few instances of hands, shoes or feet recorded to date.

The position of the possible hand is located where such a devotional offering might be expected. Prominent on entry to the church, it is a mark worthy of further investigation.



Fig 4. South doorway west side. Calvary cross with other crosses. Photo KW42



Fig 5. South doorway east side. Degraded baptismal crosses and other degraded marks. Photo KW38

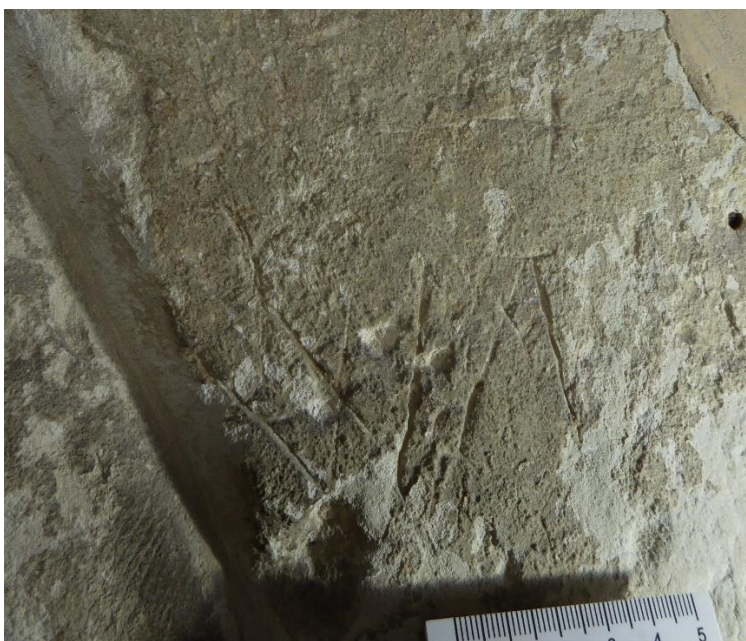


Fig 6. South doorway east side. Initials WA and small cross above. Photo KW36

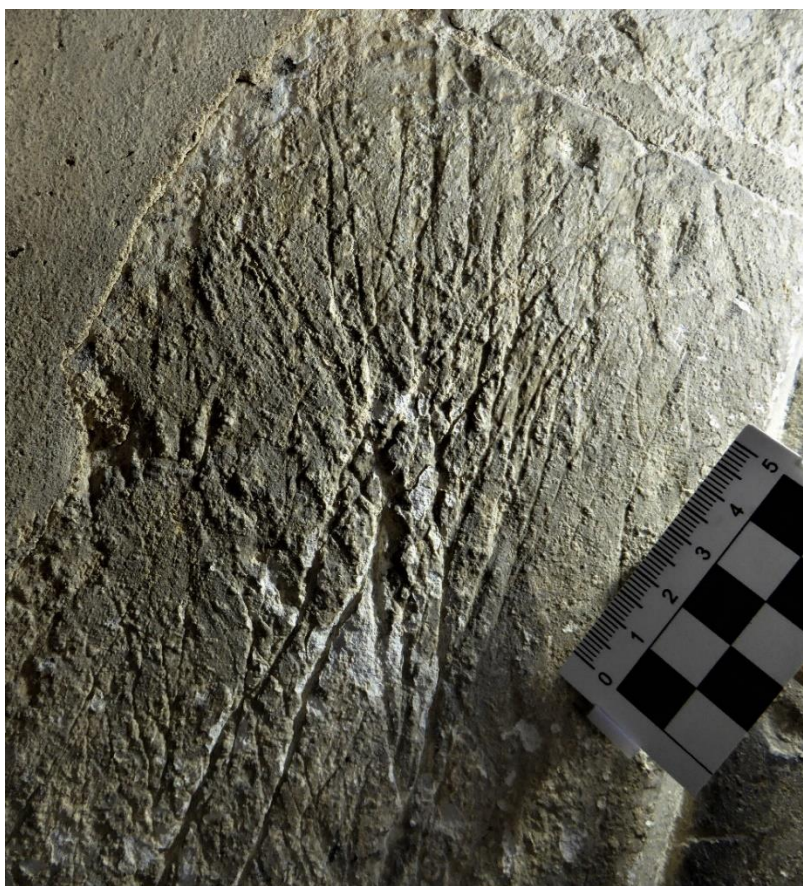


Fig 7. South doorway west side. Possible hand. Photo KW34

Passing through the **south door to the inner door jambs and surrounds** there are two areas of graffiti of particular interest. There is a large pentagram and butterfly shape on a block on the inner west side. (Figure 8). On the east side are two grids, one with a cross beneath it. (Figures 9 /10).



Fig 8. South doorway inner jamb. Pentagram with butterfly mark. Photo KP25

The pentangle was a powerful religious symbol in medieval times. In this instance because of the position of the marks at the threshold of a doorway, they may have been made to protect the entrance to the church against evil spirits – (James Wright Triskele Heritage 2021).



*Fig 9. South doorway inner jamb chamfer facing nave. Grid with cross below and to LH side.
Photo KW59*



Fig 10 South doorway inner jamb chamfer facing nave. Grid. Photo KW60

A conjoined inverted VV symbol can be seen on the south wall on the central pier to the old south arcade. (Figure 11). Such symbols are thought to derive from Marian marks, originally made as devotional symbols for the Virgin Mary, but having a more protective or apotropaic function in post-Reformation times. The chancel arch south side has a finely cut cross (Figure 12) mirrored on the chancel arch north side (Figure 13), both are facing west.



Fig 11. South wall central pier to old south arcade. Inverted VV symbol. Photo KW67

The chancel and certainly the sanctuary were the more private areas of the church and there is usually less graffiti here than in the more public areas hitherto described, ie the porch, the nave, and around the font (Champion, 2015). The finely cut crosses on the chancel arch face outwards towards the congregation.

On the south side of the chancel arch is a neatly cut mason's mark (Figure 14).



Fig 12. Chancel arch south side. Cross. Photo KP34



Fig 13. Chancel arch north side. Cross. Photo KP31



Fig 14. South side of chancel arch. Mason's mark. Photo KP33

The chancel doorway west side has a finely cut baptismal cross with other less well-defined baptismal crosses below. (Figure 15). The chancel doorway east side has a pair of inverted VV marks. (Figure 16).

The sanctuary window has a finely cut initial B (Figure 17).

Inside the vestry porch the C14th south doorway into the chancel has a cluster of crosses of different types including a simple vertical cross, a baptismal cross and what could be a Byzantine cross (Figure 18).



Fig 15. Chancel doorway west side. Baptismal cross. Photo KP49



Fig 16. Chancel doorway east side. Inverted VV's. Photo KP53



Fig 17. Sanctuary window ledge. Initial B. Photo KP61



Fig 18. Chancel doorway within vestry porch east side. Crosses. Photo KW4.

The font quatrefoil faces are covered in lines crisscrossing the stone. Between the S and SE faces are 3 crosses. Each cross is enclosed and they sit one above the other facing the south doorway. (Figure 19).



Fig 19. Font between SE and S faces. Crosses. Photo KW82

On the west-facing font stem is a pair of initials W I and a date 16_1. These are canopied by a large, inverted V. Above and left is a small circle with 3 radiating lines coming from it which seem to underlie, thus pre-dating, the inscription below. (Figure 20). There are no other pre C20th dates found in St Mary's. The gap between the 6 and the 1 might represent a zero. Instead of bothering to carve a 0, a space was left, so the date could possibly read 1601.

It is worthy of note that no compass-drawn symbols or circles, usually a common feature in English church graffiti, were found at Upton Grey.



Fig 20. Font west side of stem. Initials WI and date 16_1. Photo KW73

The bell tower, in particular the ringing chamber, is rich in C20th graffiti including names, initials and dates, written in pencil on the clock's wooden casing. These include N.Brasing, D.Childs 1936, F.Sims 1939, W.W 1936, Keith Lewis Corder, GW 1970, VP 1966, S.Stacey 1945, W.Fox 1950, I.Chipping 1948. (Figure 21).

Such C20th graffiti can provide a valuable resource for local history and family researchers.



Fig 21 Bell ringing chamber clock cupboard. Initials, names and dates. Photo KW27

Disclaimer

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References

St Mary's Church and the Community of Upton Grey. Trevor Hart (2009)

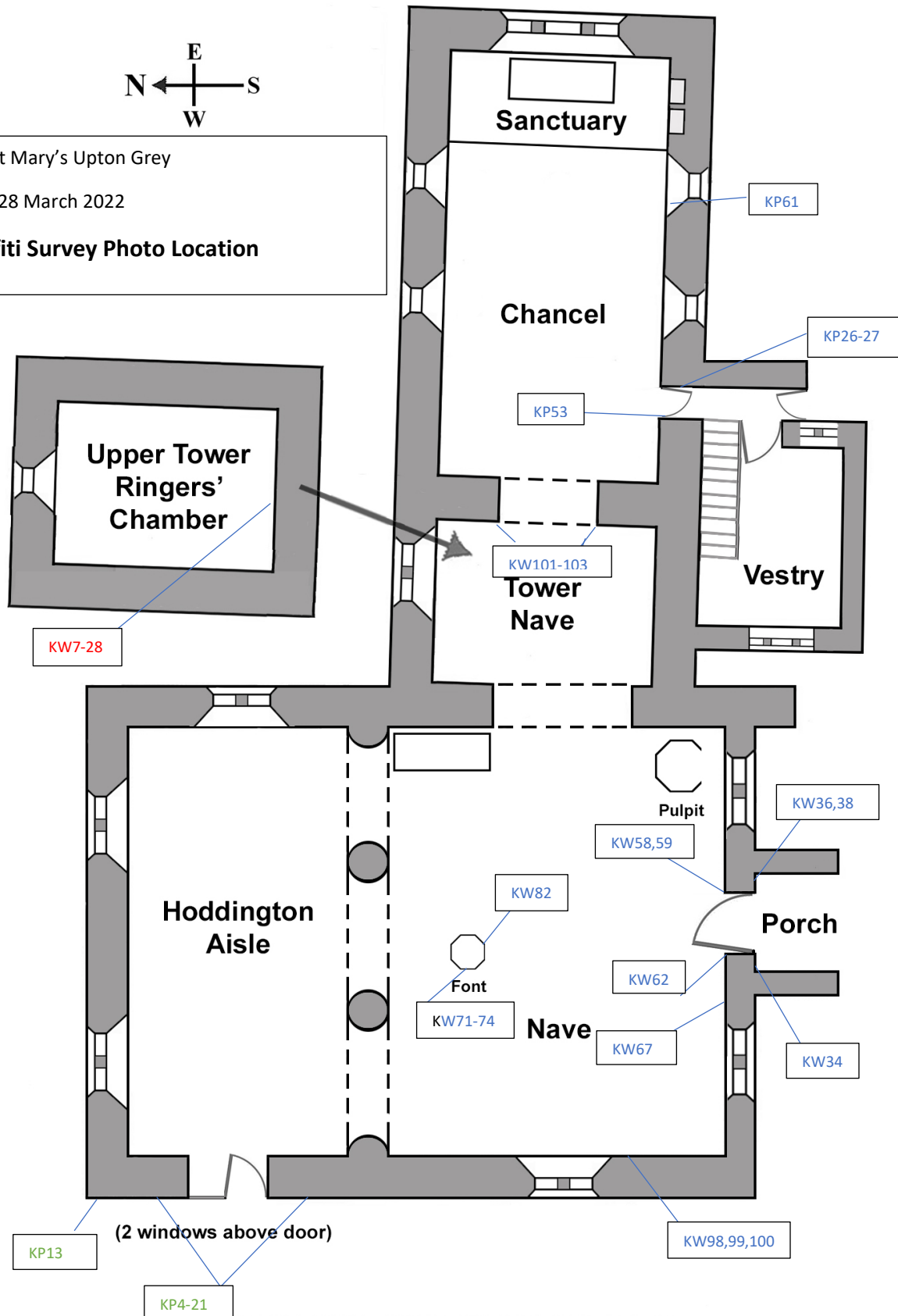
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Graffiti Survey Photo Location



St MARY'S CHURCH, UPTON GREY

