

# St Swithun-upon-Kingsgate

## Winchester

### Historical graffiti survey report



Date of survey: 21<sup>st</sup> February 2025

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Post code: S023 9JP Grid Ref: SU480291 Church Heritage Record No: 641362

Hampshire Medieval Graffiti Project

<http://www.hantsfieldclub.org.uk/medieval-graffiti/index.html>

## **St Swithun-upon-Kingsgate church, Winchester: a brief description**

The church sits over Kingsgate, a city gate which is on or close to the site of one of the Roman gates. The present gateway is probably late 14<sup>th</sup> century and has flanking walkways dating to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. St Swithun's is first mentioned in 1264, when it was burned down by citizens in a dispute with the Cathedral Priory who held the church. It is entered from a timber-framed and tile-hung early 16<sup>th</sup> century stairway, topped by a weatherboarded bellcote. The church is Grade I listed, with a simple, undivided interior and a medieval single-framed roof. It contains memorials and stained glass from other Winchester churches, such as St Maurice and St Peter Chesil.

## **Graffiti survey methodology**

The survey group consisted of volunteers from the Hampshire Medieval Graffiti Project. Besides surveying the church itself, we were also allowed access to the vestry and the undercroft. The team first scanned the building to locate the graffiti and other marks, using a raking light source. Each mark or set of marks was photographed with a digital camera or iPad. Sometimes multiple images were taken using different angles of light source. The location and type of graffiti were recorded on record sheets. Images were later transferred to a computer where further enhanced identifications were made, and this detail was collated with the original field data. As well as graffiti, construction and other "unofficial" marks, such as taper burn marks, were recorded.

## **Graffiti summary and discussion**

Most of the graffiti found in the church consists of names and initials, sometimes dated, and these are concentrated around the entrance doorway, and the windows on the south side. Although it is believed that in the medieval period many of the pilgrims coming to the cathedral would have entered through this gateway and, as the guide book says "*given thanks in this church for a safe journey, possibly to St Swithun in his niche by the altar*", there are surprisingly few crosses, which are common finds in other churches associated with medieval pilgrimage. This may be because the fabric has been much altered and such marks have not survived. We also know that by the 17<sup>th</sup> century the church had fallen into disrepair, and in 1660 it was the home of Robert Allen, the porter of Kings Gate, with his wife and family, who lived at one end of the building and kept their pigs at the other. Much of the graffiti found may well date to this post-medieval period, and certainly there are two instances of names dated to the 1650s. The church was restored soon after this and its bells were re-hung in 1677.

Although not graffiti as such, the survey also recorded the carpenters' marks which can be seen on the exposed timber framework. Timber buildings were first constructed off site, in a framing yard where the carpenters could assemble the wall-frames and roof trusses by laying them out flat on the ground and pegging them

together temporarily. Then they would mark up and number the frames and trusses before dismantling them for transport to the construction site. The numbers ensured that the right tenons went into the right mortises for an accurate fit. They were always positioned next to a joint with the same number in Roman numerals marking both joining timbers.

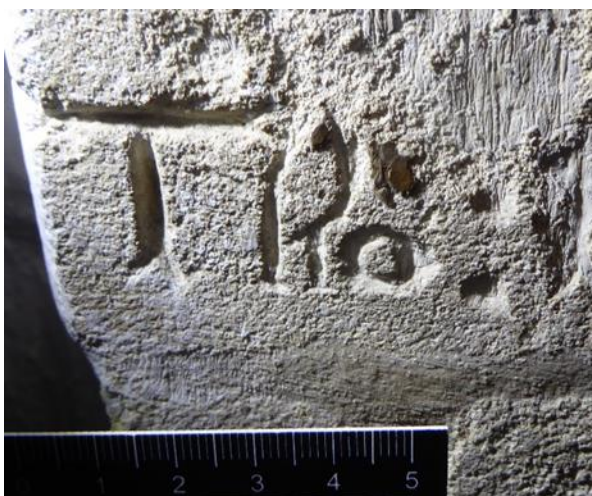
A church plan has been produced, based on that in the guidebook, to show the main areas where graffiti was found and the number and location of photographs taken. For ease of reference, the windows have also been assigned numbers. The plan is attached at the end of this report as **Appendix 1**.

## The church interior



*Fig 1. Interior looking west, showing north doorway*

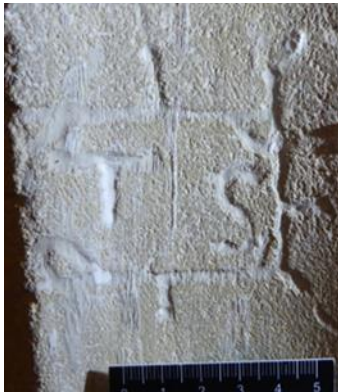
Graffiti is commonly found at the entrances to churches, made by those who wished to mark their presence as they entered a holy space. Here, there is graffiti around the north doorway (Fig 1).



*Fig 2. North doorway, east jamb. Tho.*

On the east jamb are initials or perhaps part of the name Thomas (Fig 2), and pairs of initials TD and ER occur in the same area.

On the west of the doorway are the initials TS carved within an elaborate box (Fig 3).



*Fig 3. North doorway, west jamb. Boxed initials TS*



*Fig 4. North doorway, west jamb. Crosses*

The north doorway is also one of the few places within the church where crosses are found, and there are two on the west jamb (Fig 4) and a very faint one, obscured by layers of paint and limewash on the outside wall, west of the doorway.



*Fig 5. North doorway, west side. Drilled holes forming cross*

Another cross shape formed from small, drilled holes within an incised outline is on the west side of the doorway (Fig 5). Such crosses may have been left by pilgrims on their way to the cathedral, or parishioners, as symbols of personal devotion. It is thought that small drill holes such as these might have been made by those who wished to remove stone dust from a consecrated space to use in folk remedies and cures. There are certainly many accounts of pilgrims removing stone from saints'

tombs to mix with holy water to produce healing potions (Jessopp, 1896). Fonts had locked covers to prevent people taking away holy water for similar reasons.



*Fig 6. South window 1, east jamb. Weathered stone*

There is a lot of graffiti around the south windows, and the lower parts of the stone surrounds are very worn, weathered and gouged (Fig 6). This may have been caused by exposure to the elements when the building had fallen into disrepair in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, or the result of human activity. Much of the graffiti may have been made when the church was out of use, and some is actually dated to this time, for example, directly beneath south window 2, on the stone surround, is incised the name T. Phillips, with the date 1650 (Fig 7).

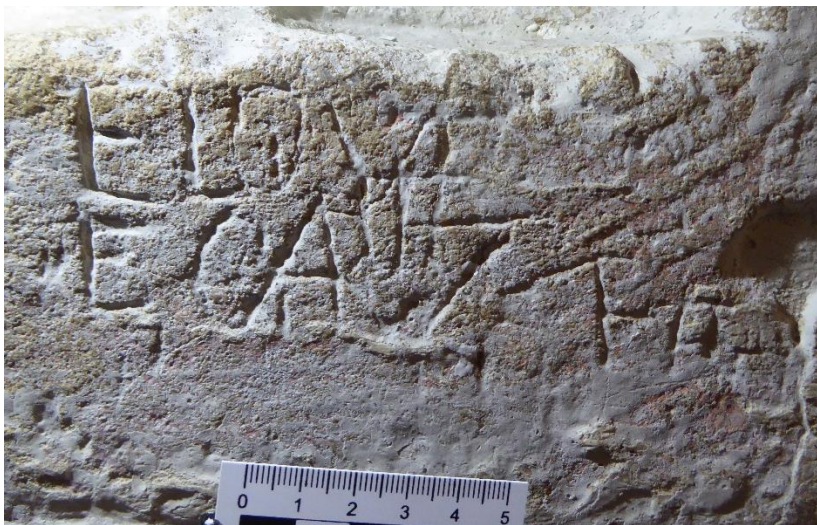


*Fig 7. South window 2. T Phillips 1650*



*Fig 8. South window 2, west side. Henry Cropp*

Another name, Henry Cropp, occurs on the west side of this window, with another name, Peter, written underneath (Fig 8). There are more letters, possibly names, on the edge of the windowsill, but they are indecipherable (Fig 9).



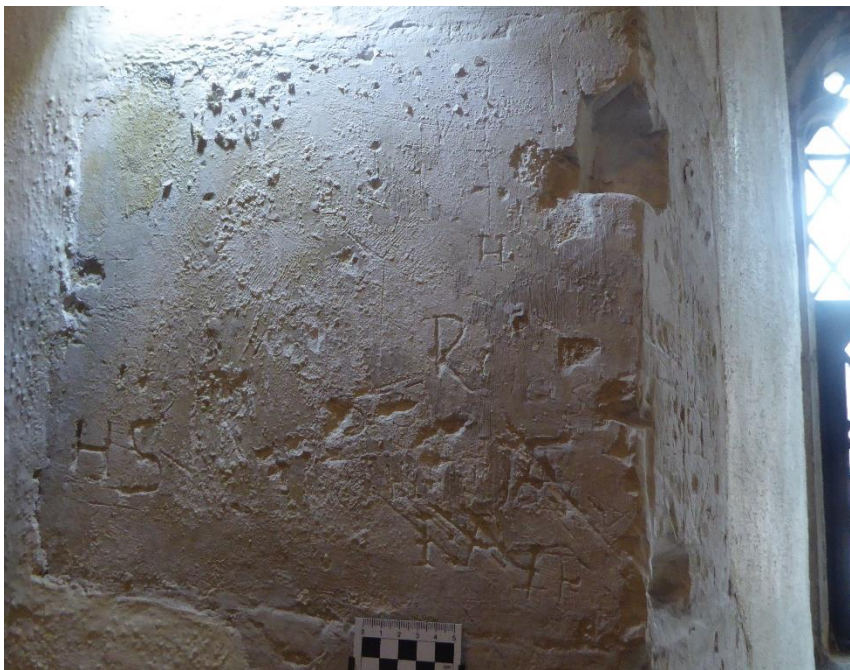
*Fig 9. South window 2, sill. Illegible text, probably names*



*Fig 10. South window 2, east jamb. Shield with initials CT*

There is a shield shape containing the initials CT on the east jamb of south window 2 (Fig 10). The creator of this graffiti may have wanted to confer more status to their initials by depicting them within a shield.

On the surface of the same block of stone that faces into the nave are several single and pairs of initials (Fig 11). Among these are at least two instances of the initials IA (Fig 12),



*Fig 11. South window 1, east side, initials*



*Fig 12. South window 1, east side. close-up of repeated initials IA*

On the north wall, between the windows, is a sixteenth century niche bearing the arms of Winchester diocese (Fig 13).



*Fig 13. Niche on north wall*



*Fig 14. North wall, niche shelf. Initials IA*

There are some initials cut into the vertical edge of the shelf. These are WI, A and another, deeply scored, IA (Fig 14).



*Fig 15. North wall, niche. John Aylward 1650*



*Fig 16. North wall, niche. close up of date 1652*

On the horizontal surface of the shelf, now at a height which is hard to see from the current floor level, is a name dated to 1652, that of John Aylward (Figs 15 & 16). It would be interesting to carry out more research to see if there is any link between him and his contemporary, T Phillips. It is also tempting to wonder if John Aylward was responsible for the repetition of the initials IA on the window opposite, and on the shelf below the niche, as I also stood for the initial J.

A possible apotropaic or protective symbol occurs on the east jamb of south window 2 (Fig 17). This is a small V V symbol, consisting of two intersecting Vs, which is often found around windows and doors, made to protect a building and its occupants from evil spirits. The mark originated from a symbol of devotion to the Virgin Mary,

VV standing for *Virgo Virginum*, Virgin of the Virgins, but after the Reformation it evolved to become more of a protective or apotropaic mark.



*Fig 17. South window 1, east side. Possible VV apotropaic mark*

Unusually, no other apotropaic graffiti was identified within the church, although taper burn marks on the timber staircase are thought to have served this function, see on.

There is a mason's marking out line on the sill of north window 3 (Fig 18). No other marks made by masons were found.



*Fig 18. North window 3, sill. Mason's marking out line*

## The stairway

The timber framework of the entrance staircase dates to c1500 (ref: church guidebook) (Fig 19).



*Fig 19. Timber-framed entrance staircase*

On the timber uprights at each side of the top of the stairs, are tear-shaped burn marks, which are also known as **taper burn marks** (Figs 20 & 21).



*Fig 20. Timber upright, west side of top of stairs. Taper burn marks*



*Fig 21. Timber upright, east side of top of stairs. Taper burn marks*

These taper burn marks are thought to have been made deliberately, to protect the building, possibly against fire. Such marks are sometimes explained as being made accidentally, caused by candles placed against surfaces, but experimental archaeology by Dean and Hill (2014) show that these marks are difficult to create accidentally and are more likely to have been made deliberately. Context also aids interpretation, and here they occur in clusters, on each side of the entrance into the church, a seemingly deliberate positioning which may have been meant to protect against the ingress of evil. Such burn marks and other protective or apotropaic symbols, like the VV symbol by the south window, are usually found around building openings where evil spirits might enter.

### **Carpenters' marks**

There are some carpenters' marks visible on the 16<sup>th</sup> century timber framework above the north doorway. There is a mark consisting of 4 parallel lines on the west side, and a VI shape on the east (Fig 22).



*Fig 22. Carpenters' marks above north doorway. Arrows show locations on east and west sides*

On the ground floor, in the vestry, are two matching V-shaped carpenters' marks on adjacent timber joists in the southwest corner of the ceiling (Fig 23).



*Fig 23. Carpenters' marks in vestry*

## **The Undercroft**

The Undercroft is at street level, reached by a door in the west passageway. An unusual piece of graffiti was found on a stone block forming part of the west wall.

This is a carefully cut square-shaped indentation containing an upward-pointing arrow shape next to an initial I, with an additional diagonal line coming from the I (Figs 24 & 25).



*Fig 24. Undercroft, west wall. Square indentation containing graffiti arrow shape and initial I*

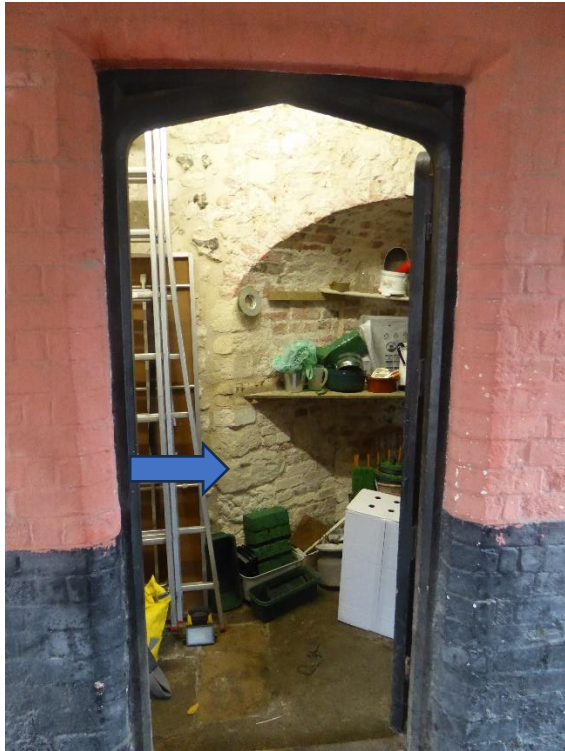


Fig 25. Undercroft. View through entrance door from street. Arrow shows location of graffiti shown as Fig 24

Similar box shapes usually contain pairs of initials, as that in Fig 3, but the arrow shape in this context is very unusual and its significance is not known.

## Acknowledgements

Our thanks go to John Stanning, church warden, who welcomed us to St Swithun's and kindly provided us with access into the vestry and undercroft.

## References

Bullen, Michael, Crook, John, Hubbock, Rodney, and Pevsner, Nikolaus (2010) **The Buildings of England. Hampshire: Winchester and the North.**

Dean, John and Hill, Nick (2014) **Burn marks on buildings: Accidental or Deliberate?** Vernacular Architecture, Vol 45, 1-15

Jessopp A and James M.R (eds) (1896). **The Life and Miracles of St William of Norwich.** Cambridge University Press.

**St Swithun upon Kingsgate, Winchester. Church guide (2010)**

## **Survey archive**

110 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 Winchester Historic Environment Record and with the church, and the report has been posted on the HFC website [www.hantsfieldclub.org.uk](http://www.hantsfieldclub.org.uk).

## **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.

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**April 2025**

# APPENDIX 1. Church floor plan to show location of photographs

