



St Peter and Holy Cross church, Wherwell

Graffiti Survey summary

A team from the Hampshire Medieval Graffiti Project visited the church on 13th July and 14th September 2019. We were welcomed by members of the Wherwell History Group who kindly provided much useful background information about the history of the church, and of the adjacent priory site, helping us to put the site into context.

Most of the fabric of the present church is mid-nineteenth century in date, although traces of the earlier medieval structure still survive, and a collection of early architectural fragments, probably from the priory church, are displayed in the north aisle. These include a Saxon cross-shaft, two late 13th century carved stone reliefs, a pier base bearing the name Tho(ma)s Beow, and fragments from a stone coffin. There is also the recumbent effigy of a nun, originating from the priory church but more lately moved from a niche in the churchyard wall, once thought to represent the Abbess Euphemia but now tentatively identified as Juliana Overey.

The original aim of the survey was to examine these earlier fragments for historical graffiti, and to look for any surviving medieval fragments preserved within the church fabric or its surrounding walls. We were grateful to the History Group members who could show these to us, and who also pointed out the 1858 Iremonger mausoleum in the churchyard, which incorporates some impressive Romanesque monster heads, and some medieval shields. We would also survey the church to record all graffiti present, because, despite our name, we do not just record medieval graffiti. Even more recent inscriptions contribute to the history of the church and its parishioners, and can be useful for those researching family and local histories.

The Survey Findings

Rather disappointingly the only graffiti we found on the **pre-Reformation stonework** inside the church was a cross and some masons' marking out lines on the pier base. On the tomb of Sir Owen West, died 1551, also in the NW corner of the N aisle, was an incised cross and some faint initials, P or RS. We found no graffiti on the mausoleum stonework.

On the **interior church fabric** the most striking and unusual graffito was the carefully incised drawing of a church building with tall tower. This was on the west-facing wall of the passageway between the vestry and chancel. What building it represents is unknown, but it does not seem to be this church. Within the vestry itself, on the S wall, is an incised leaf shape.

Some geometric shapes, crosses and patterns were found on the sill of window 4 (see plan). One may be an elaborate VV pattern. These were originally invocations to the Virgin Mary, VV standing for Virgo Virginum, Virgin of the Virgins, but post-Reformation they were used more generally as apotropaic symbols, protecting against evil. More geometric shapes, which seem to have been deliberately formed rather than being random scratches, were found around window 8, on the S jamb and the sill of window 6. The pattern on the jamb seems to form a tower of boxes, but frustratingly is obscured by an electricity cable. The pattern on the sill is made up of double, parallel lines.

As well as the markings noted above, there were a number of initials, names and dates around windows 6 and 8. Incised initials around window 6, on the S wall, included AL 64, DH, ER, HAM, TS and EN, both enclosed in boxes, a deeply scored RV, and rows of Xs. There were also traces of abraded pencil inscriptions. The names H Trim and F Goody are incised on the sill of window 8.

Very little graffiti was found on the columns. A possible letter W was found incised on the NW side of column 4, and a very abraded name and some calculations in pencil were found on column 6. From our observations, we believe that only the 2 westernmost columns at the end of each arcade are re-used, and the remainder of the arcade columns, N and S, are part of the Victorian rebuild. This is because the stone blocks are so different in appearance and have not been dressed in the same way. Although not classed as graffiti, but sometimes mistaken for it, are the surface effects of stone dressing techniques. At Wherwell we came across a distinctive swirling lines, suggesting the stone surface had been scoured in some way.

On the **church exterior** only one graffito was noted: a cross on the north wall. The Ordnance Survey benchmark on the SE corner of the S aisle was recorded.

We were kindly given access to the **belfry area**, and on our first visit were even treated to a demonstration of the Ellacombe Chiming Apparatus. Such areas are always a good source of graffiti, left by generations of bell ringers. Here, there were traces of names left on the plaster surfaces, though many are now very worn and illegible. R Young left his name here three times in the 1920s, and other legible names included R Penney, Spratt and F Hallett. A full list of names found are included as an appendix to this report.

The most productive areas for graffiti were the **wooden organ casing** and the pews. Many names are recorded on the organ, many left by those who had to pump it during services, hence the exhortation "Keep on pumping"! Some people added dates. One was Denis Harding who carefully carved his name on 1st July 1939. Sadly this gentleman had only died a short time before our first visit, so would have been about 12 when he left his mark. Some people whiled away their time listing animals, or left lists of dates or references to the order of service. Others drew caricatures, made scurrilous remarks, or dreamt of racing cars.

The pews, which must be part of the original fittings of the church, dating to mid nineteenth century, provided a wealth of interesting graffiti. The earliest dated names were Thomas Rogers 1872 and HW 1885 on Pew 1, and a palimpsest of names and patterns on pew 4 appeared 19th century in date stylistically. Caricatures, possibly of parishioners, abound.

Was J. Claydon the pipe-smoking figure drawn next to his name? There are glimpses into everyday life, including some charming depictions of ladies' lace-up boots on pew 16, and a surprising number of sailing ships.

Some pew ends have names written on them, suggesting these pews were for the use of particular families. The names are very worn now, but Mill, Smith and Carter can still be discerned at the ends of pews 3, 4, 12 and 13.

Acknowledgements

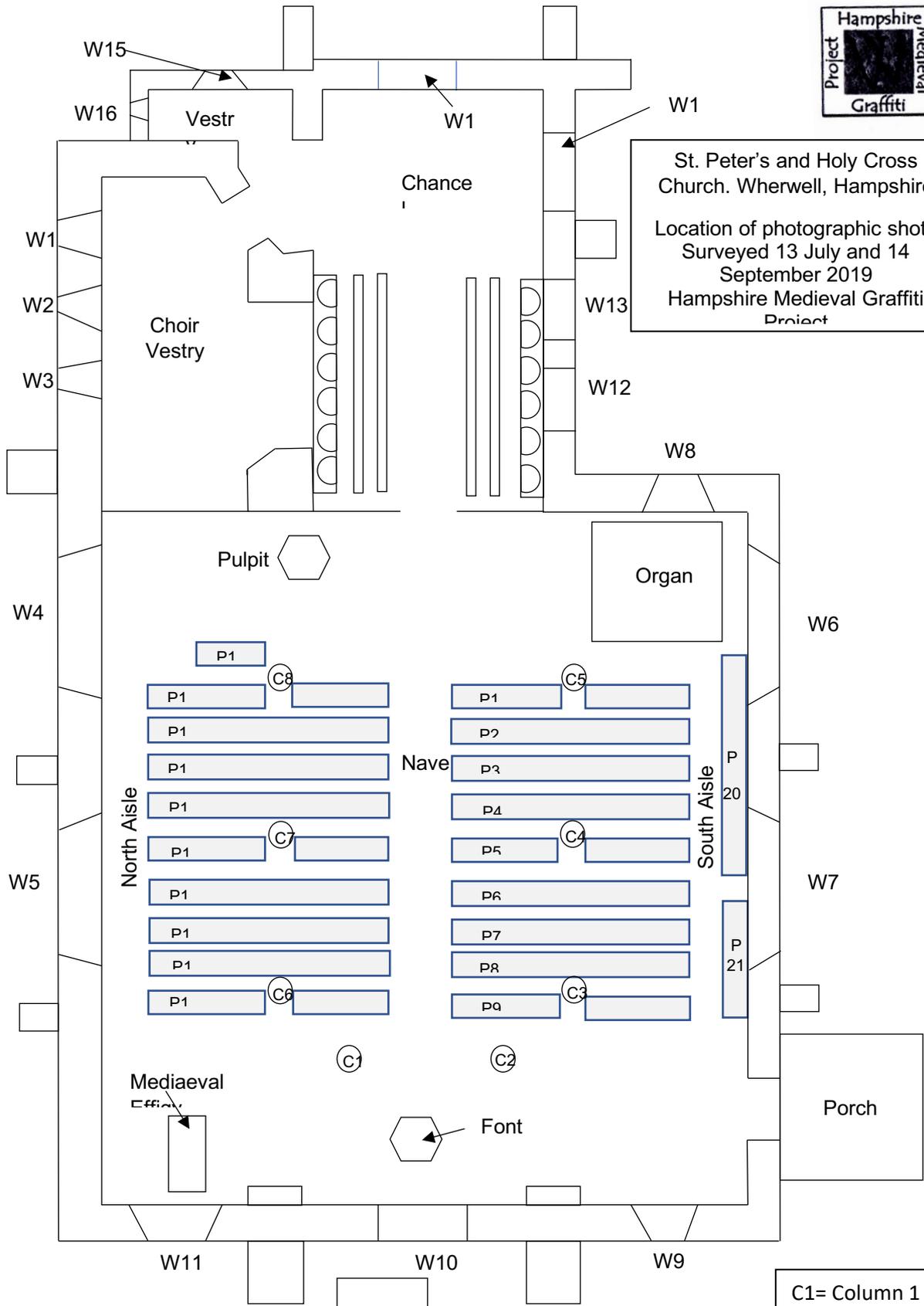
Special thanks go to Andrew Flanagan who helped arrange our visits and provide access to the belfry and to the end of the south aisle. We would also like to thank David Etchells for the introduction to the church's history and copies of articles, and all the kind folk who made us so welcome, providing refreshments and the benefit of their knowledge and enthusiasm for this historic building.

Karen Wardley, Co-ordinator, HMGP

October 2019



St. Peter's and Holy Cross Church. Wherwell, Hampshire
Location of photographic shots
Surveyed 13 July and 14
September 2019
Hampshire Medieval Graffiti
Project



← North

Spratt Grave →



C1= Column 1
W1=Window 1
P1=Pew 1