

# Hursley, All Saints' church - historical graffiti report

## Hampshire Medieval Graffiti Survey



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**4<sup>th</sup> June and 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2022**

**OS Grid Ref: SU 427 252**

**Postcode: SO21 2JB**

**Church Heritage Record No: 641340**

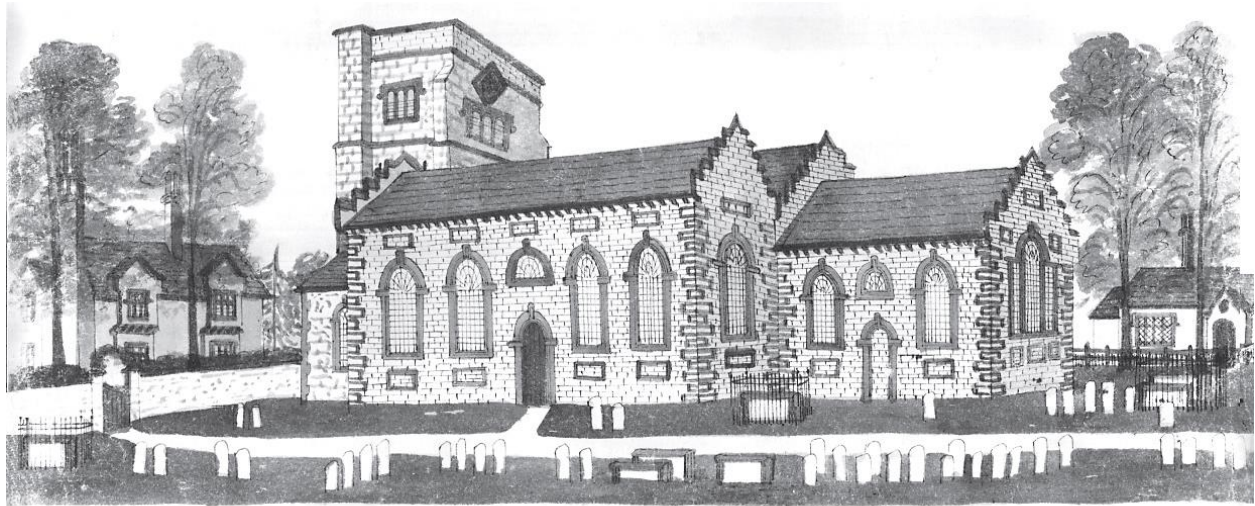
Hampshire Medieval Graffiti Survey

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

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## Brief History of All Saints' church, Hursley

The church is best known for its associations with John Keble, the pioneer leader of the Oxford Movement. It was designed for him by JP Harrison, and built in 1846-8, in the Victorian Gothic revival style. It encased a church which had been much remodeled in 1752-3. (Fig. 1)



1 The 18th century church, reproduced by kind permission of Antonia Stickland

The earliest remaining feature is the west tower, thought to date from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Earlier stone mouldings, some with Norman decoration, can be seen within its fabric, as well as reused material for later rebuilding. The spire which was added in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was taken down in 1960.

## Graffiti summary and discussion

### Method

The survey of the church took place over 2 visits. The exterior, the north and south porches, and the exterior of the Heathcote Mausoleum, situated in the south-west corner of the churchyard, were surveyed on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2022. Access to the tower and roof was kindly provided to the team on 23<sup>rd</sup> July, when these areas, along with the interior of the nave and chancel were also recorded. A record was also made of the marks on the brick wall of the adjacent village hall, once the village school. Initial identification of the graffiti in the interior was done visually using a raking light source. Graffiti on the exterior could be seen in ambient daylight conditions. Each graffiti mark was recorded with a digital camera. 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 collated. 340 images were taken in total.

## **General remarks**

The HMGP usually concentrates on earlier graffiti, so the main area of interest for our visit was the medieval west tower: its chambers and staircase and the outer west doorway. However, we also checked for and recorded all later graffiti, including a significant amount of 18<sup>th</sup> century and later graffiti on the Heathcote Mausoleum, which was built in 1771 within the churchyard. The graffiti found on this structure is described in a separate report.

## **Graffiti in detail**

### **The Tower Exterior**

#### **The west doorway**



Around the doorway, on the mouldings on the north and south sides, are incised many sets of initials, some within elaborate frames, and some with dates. The dates are all from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The dated initials WT 1783 are prominent and are on both sides of the doorway, repeated at least three times. (Fig. 2)

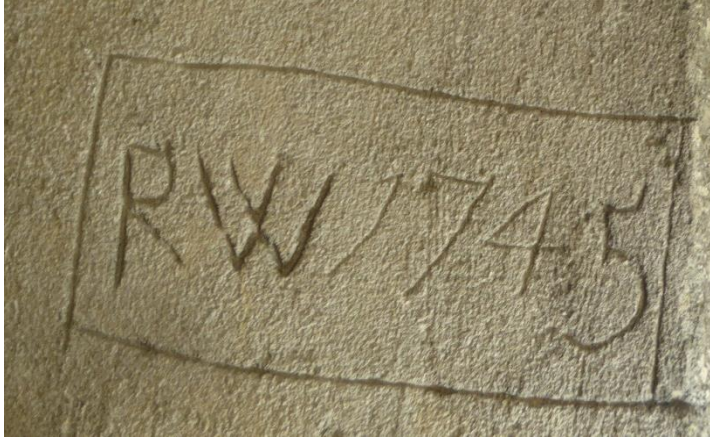


*2 South side of doorway. Elaborate boxed initials WT 1783*

It is thought (Champion, 2018) that some boxed initials were made as memorials for those who could not afford more expensive stone monuments within the church. However, the repetition of these initials, and their prominent location, suggest that perhaps they were made by a living individual, very keen to make his mark. (The frequency of initials left as graffiti at this time suggest that most were made by men, and W is most likely to represent the name William.) Another elaborate set, of WB 1833, surmounted by a heart shape (Fig. 3), is perhaps copying this earlier piece of graffiti.

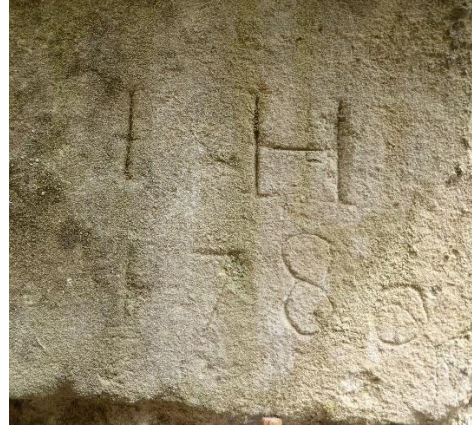


*3 South side of doorway, WB 1833*



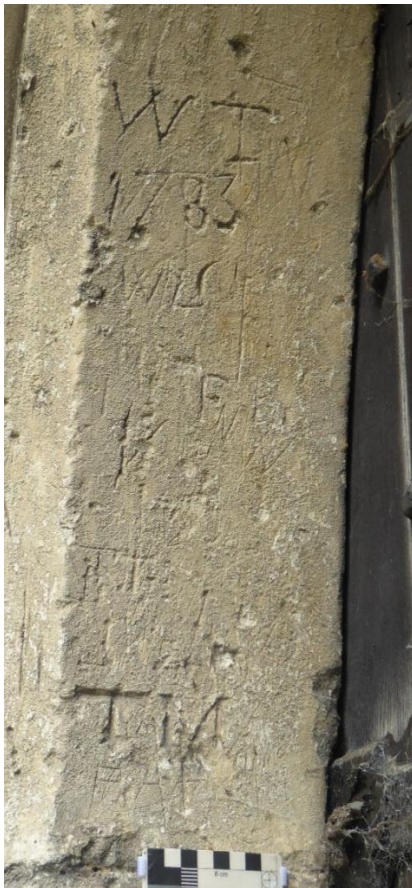
4. South door, south jamb. RW 1745

Other less elaborate examples of dated boxed initials include RW 1745 (Fig. 4), while IH 1780 has no surround (Fig. 5).



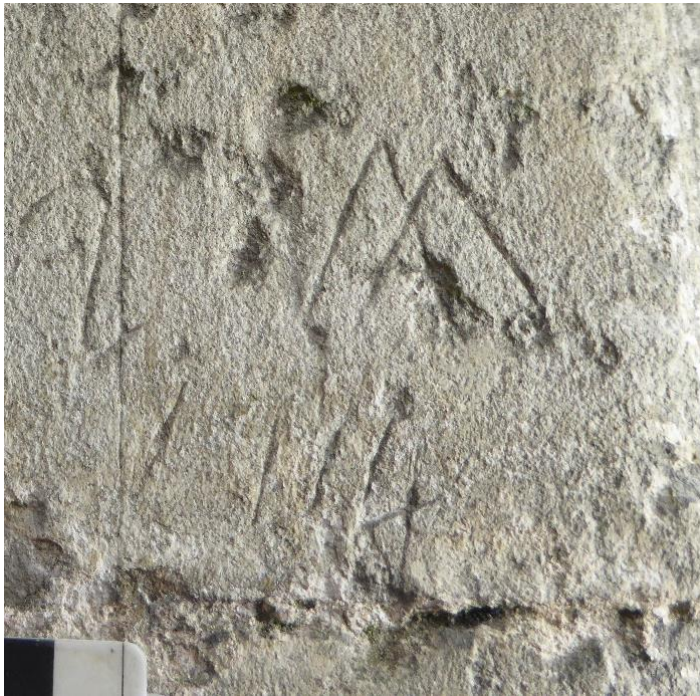
5 Wall to north of doorway. IH 1780

There are many undated examples of both paired initials and single letters (Fig. 6).



6 North side of door arch. WT 1783 (again) and other initials

Among the initials is a symbol which could represent the letter M, made of a pair of overlapping inverted Vs. Such marks are sometimes known as Marian marks. They were originally devotional religious symbols, the Vs standing for Virgo Virginum, Virgin of the Virgins, invoking the Virgin Mary, but in time their religious significance was forgotten and, post-Reformation, they were used instead more as lucky symbols, or apotropaic marks, a protection against evil, and often found around building openings such as windows or this doorway (Fig. 7).



*7 Doorway, south jamb. Marian mark*

Perhaps surprisingly there are not many crosses, the main Christian symbol. However, there are two deeply cut cross shapes on each side of the doorway. Whether these have religious significance, or whether they had a more prosaic function, holding door

fittings, is unknown. However, they are not at the same height which may argue against their functional purpose (Figs. 8 and 9).



*8 Deeply gouged cross shape, south side of door*



*9 Deeply gouged cross shape, north side of door*

There are areas with groupings of small indentations or dot patterns. These may have been made to help with marking out letters, as some letters have such dots as terminals. However, they may have some other purpose or significance, as yet unknown (Fig. 10).



10 North side of door arch. Dots and initials

On the south side of the doorway is a roughly drawn circular shape, with lines radiating out from a central point, which at first glance might be interpreted as a mass dial. However, it appears to be in its original location, not on a south-facing wall, and is divided by a central cross shape into four quadrants, each containing a petal shape, with curved outlines and a central straight spine. This form of quatrefoil cross is similar to that of consecration crosses, which mark the locations around the church (twelve on the interior, twelve on the outside) where the bishop consecrated the building with holy oil. The Victoria County History (VCH) for Hampshire, Vol III, originally published in 1908 but now available on-line, records this quatrefoil as “what may be a consecration cross”. Even if this mark is too crudely made to be a consecration cross, it probably still represents religious symbolism (Fig. 11).



11 South side of west door. 2 views of circular device with quatrefoil, with annotated image on rhs. Possible consecration cross

## Tower south wall

High up, on the south-west corner of the tower, can be seen a large stone which has a semicircular shape incised into it, with lines radiating from a central point, dividing the semicircle into roughly equal parts. There are also two large holes in the centre of the stone (Fig. 12).



12 Southwest corner of tower. Reused sundial

This would seem to be a reused stone which was originally a vertical sundial, probably set into the south wall of the church. In Hampshire, there is an 18<sup>th</sup> century example in situ at St Mary and All Saints church, Ellingham, and a 19<sup>th</sup> century example at St Mary's church,

Breamore, over the south doorway. The two holes would have held the central

gnomon, which cast the shadow to indicate the time. A parallel at St Mary's church, Selling, in Kent, showing the gnomon fixing, can be found on the British Sundial Society website. <https://sundialsoc.org.uk/dials/st-marys-church-23965/>

Perhaps this was originally part of the design of the 18<sup>th</sup> century church.

There is also a small cross incised into a block, just above the plinth on the south side of the tower.

## The Tower interior

Within the tower, the bell chamber, ringing room and the whole of the stairway from ground level to the roof, were surveyed. We were also given access on to **the roof**, where some graffiti was seen. However, the roof lead was restored relatively recently so the graffiti is clearly modern. The name J C Hallitt was clearly scratched onto the south-east panel, while other marks and scratches are less distinct.

The tower was heightened in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the upper part of the stairway, beneath the roof, contains a lot of early twentieth century graffiti, mainly consisting of names and initials, both incised and in pencil, some dated, some including a place name, eg HB 1910 Basingstoke (Fig. 13).



13 Tower staircase wall. HB 1910 Basingstoke

These types of graffiti continue down the staircase along with earlier examples. Next to the window between the bell chamber and the ringing room are 2 pairs of initials: JI:VI above the date 1616 (Fig. 14).

Above the initials are a pair of intersecting Vs. These could represent the initial W, but it is more likely this is an apotropaic mark, sometimes known as a Marian mark, similar to the mark described earlier, by the west doorway.

In the **bell chamber** are some pencil inscriptions, mainly illegible, one possibly dated 1907, and some possible masons' marks (see on). In the **ringing room** is another possible mason's mark by the south window (see on) and a small cross incised next to the west window. Above the doorway are some faint shapes, possibly the initials CR.



14 Tower staircase, window between bell chamber and ringing room. JI:VI 1616. VV symbol above

Two fine examples of 17<sup>th</sup> century graffiti occur just outside the ringing room, on the jamb of the entrance arch into the staircase. These are the names John Woll 1627 and John Frostt with a scratched-out date, which is possibly 1609 or 1629 (Fig. 15). Both names are enclosed within shield-shaped surrounds. We can only speculate what these dates represent, and further research into the parish records may shed some light on

this. Woll or Wool is a local name and there are a number of contemporary references to people with this name within the parish records. In his 1993 guidebook, S.C Rawden noted that

“Previous to 1664 parish registers were not completed by the minister but by a person chosen and sworn to office. At the beginning of one book is the following note:

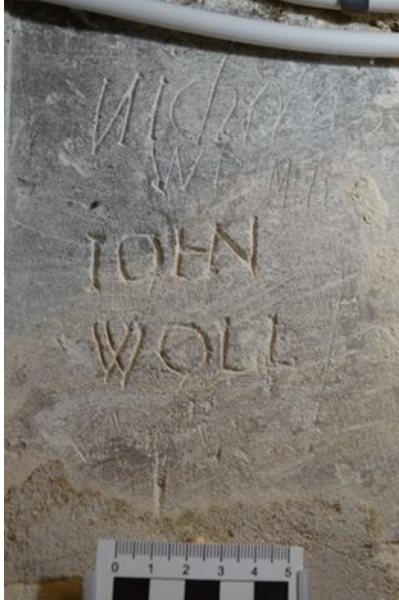
The two and twenty day of September Anno domini 1633 John Wool of Hursley was elected and chosen Parish Register (sic) of Hursley and Otterbourne and sworn for the true executing there of before me Richard Cromwell”.

Could this relate to the John Woll commemorated in 1627? Other occurrences of this name within parish records include the baptism of John Wooll on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1610, the marriage of John Woll to Agnes Cowse on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1590, and the burial of Johyn Wooll in Hursley on 20<sup>th</sup> November 1628.

Perhaps the inscription celebrates John Woll joining the bell ringing team, and as two of the bells were hung in 1616, he could have rung one of these (pers. comm. Antonia Stickland).



*15 Tower staircase, below ringing room. John Woll and John Frostt*



The name John Woll is repeated lower down the staircase, beneath the name Nicholas, which has the letter N reversed, and two sets of initials, WI and MR. It is not possible to say in which order these marks were inscribed (Fig. 16).

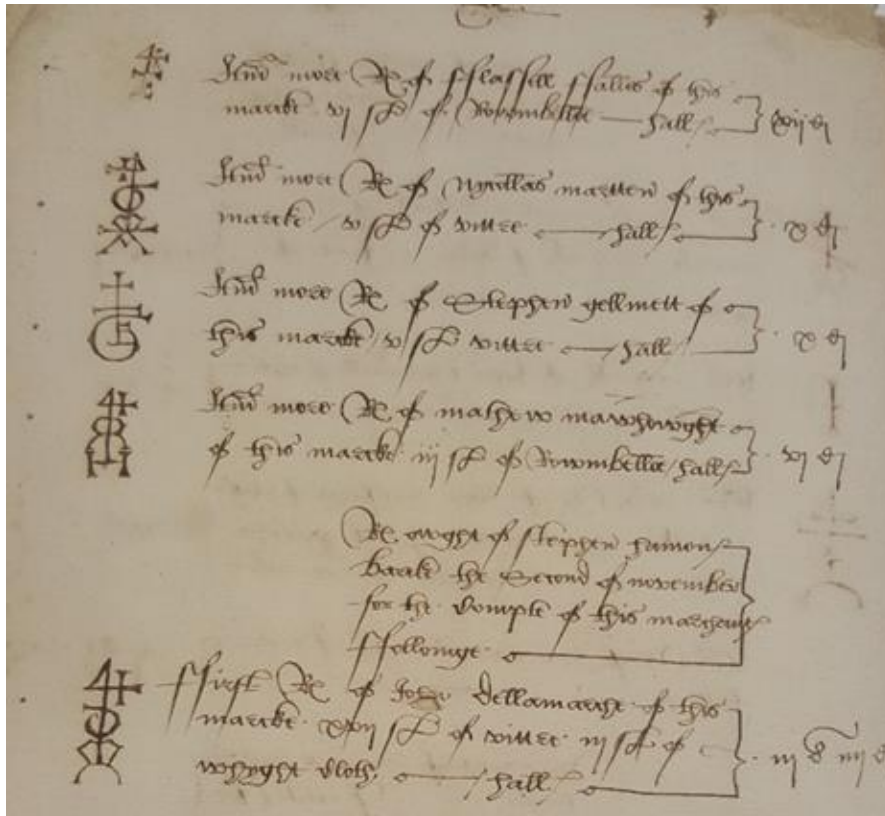
*16 Tower staircase, John Woll and other names and initials*

*17 Tower staircase outside ringing room. Merchant mark*



*18 Tudor House, Southampton. 17th century merchant mark*

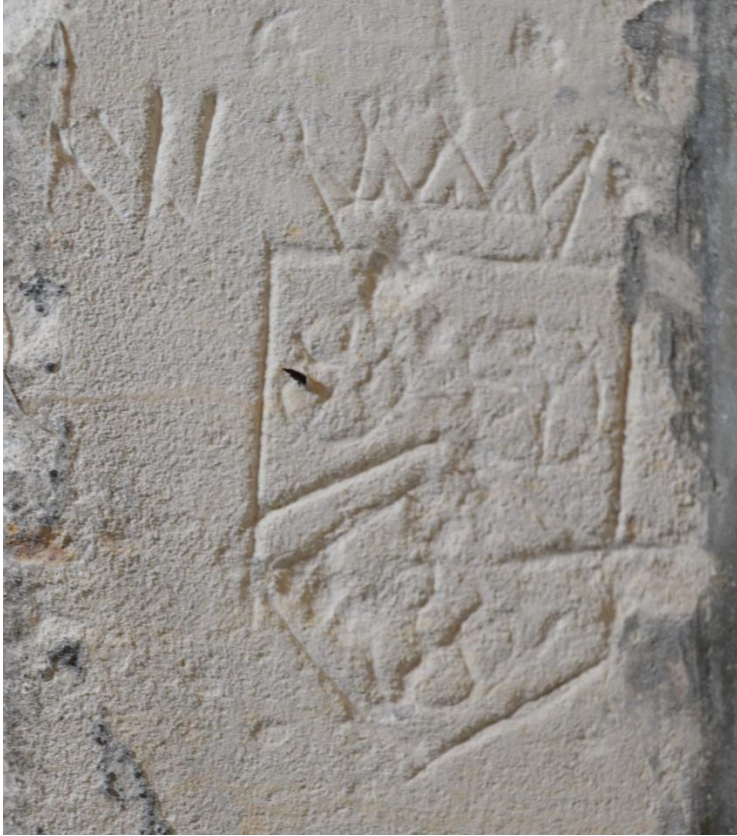
Also opposite the doorway into the ringing chamber is carved a merchant mark (Fig.17). Such marks were used like trademarks, to identify the goods of local merchants. They are often found as graffiti, for example in Tudor House Museum, Southampton (Fig. 18). Sometimes such marks are used in contemporary documents as a form of personal identifier in lieu of a signature, for examples in the Southampton Linen Hall Book of 1554-5, (Fig. 19), housed in Southampton City Archives.



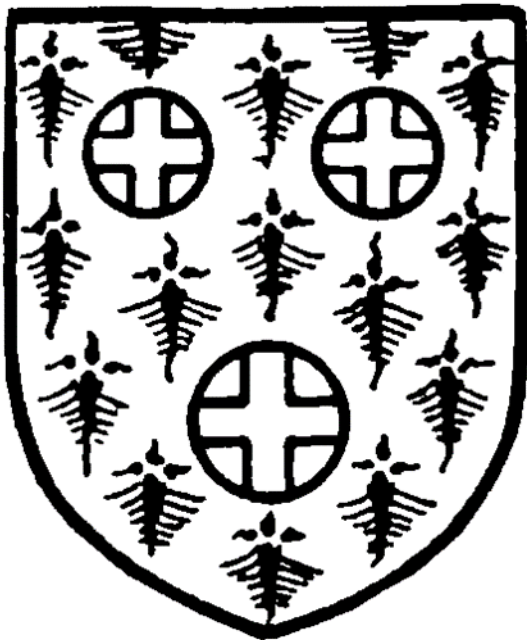
19 Linen Hall Book, 1554-5, Southampton City Archives. Merchants' marks.

Further down the staircase is a depiction of an armorial shield (Fig 20). Unfortunately, it is hard to identify such heraldic devices when no colour is present. The coronet surmounting the shield is an indication of the bearer's rank, so again, further research may help to identify the family represented by this shield, which is presumably a local one. It might represent the Heathcote coat of arms, shown in the VCH as having "three roundels vert within each is a cross or on top of a ground of ermine" (Fig 21). Sir William Heathcote bought the manor in 1718, and it remained in this family until 1899.

Next to the shield is another set of intersecting Vs, another possible apotropaic mark. (Fig. 20).

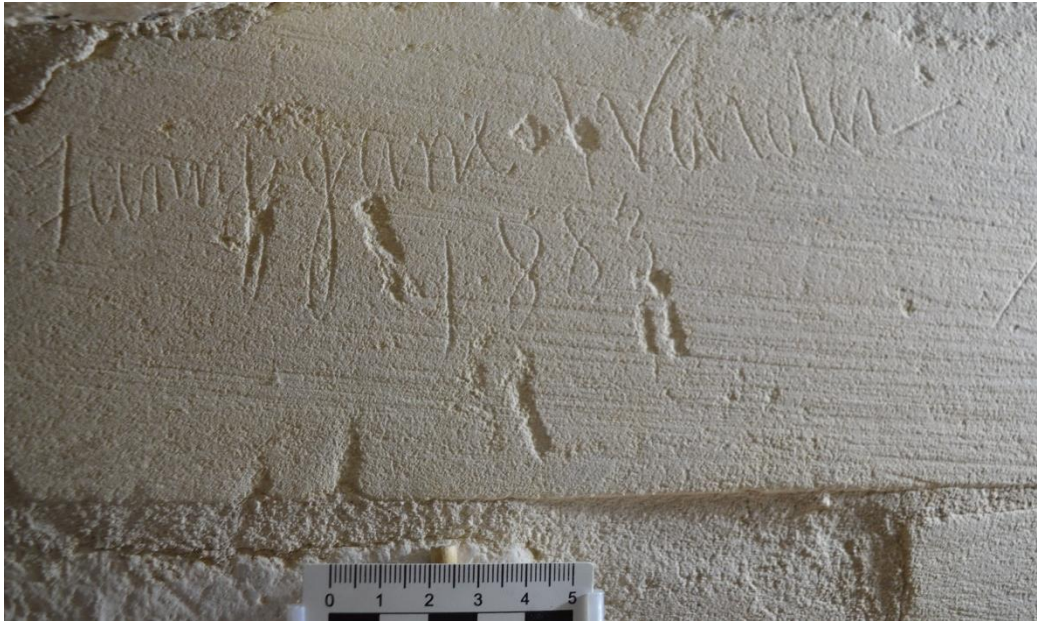


20 Tower staircase. Heraldic shield and VV apotropaic mark



21. Heathcote coat of arms, from VCH

At the base of the stairway is incised the name Fanny Jane ?Warden 1883 (Fig. 21). It is very unusual to find graffiti made by women, and it would be interesting to see if further research can find out anything more about Fanny.



21 Tower staircase, ground level. Fanny Jane ?Warden

A list of all the names found, and the dated initials, is attached as an appendix to this report



An unusual type of graffiti which occurs is what looks like an architectural sketch, on the north side of the doorway into the ringing chamber. It shows a round-headed arch feature, possibly a window (Fig. 22). Whether this is a contemporary depiction of an architectural feature which existed in the earlier church building is not known.

22 Tower ringing chamber, doorway. Architectural drawing

## Masons' marks

Some marks are identified as masons' marks because of their location and the manner of carving. There are relatively few of them, and no marks are repeated, apart from two cross shapes in the bell chamber, above the north and south window arches. Other shapes include a diamond shape containing a cross, on the south wall of the bell chamber (Fig. 23). A shape resembling an hourglass, next to the south window in the ringing room, may also be a mason's mark (Fig.24).



23 Bell chamber, south wall, mason's mark

At ground level, on the south side of the tower arch, too high up to be carved in situ, is a finely carved mason's mark which might be based on a monogram of initials I and D, or possibly an I and H. It could also be a lower-case h. (Fig. 25).



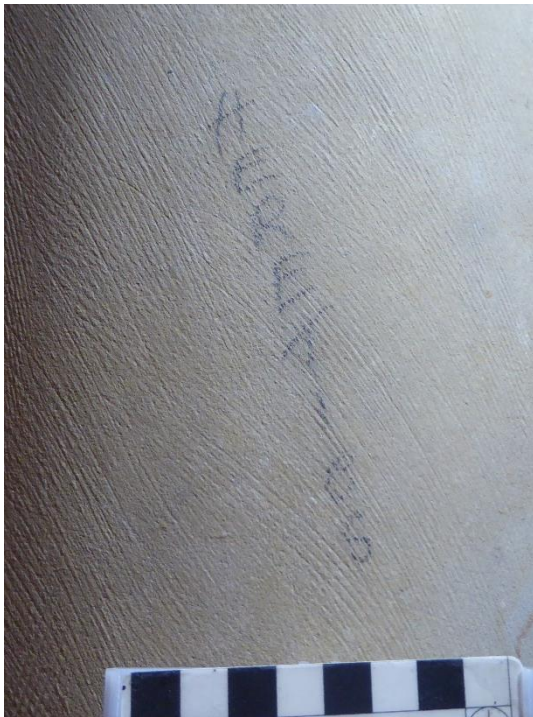
24 Ringing room, south window, possible mason's mark



25 Tower arch, south side, mason's mark

## The Church Interior

The small amount of modern graffiti on the interior fabric of the nave and chancel and in the north and south porches obviously dates from the nineteenth century onwards. On the **nave columns** there are sets of initials, probably made by parishioners seated in the pews. AE inscribed their initials at least twice, while DC and JD occur together as a romantic coupling. On the same north pillar is a column of pairs of initials. A dramatic pencil comment “HERETICS” occurs on the south pillar next to the font (Fig. 26), along with more prosaic pencil calculations, presumably made by builders working there.



26 South pillar, nave, next to font

In the **north porch** are a number of scratched initials and shapes. There is more graffiti in the **south porch**, including initials, first names (eg Mark, Rick, Cindy), shapes including large crosses incised into the plaster on the east wall, and asterisks or 8-armed crosses by a window and on the entrance arch. There is a neatly incised monogram, AFW, above the east window (Fig. 27).



27 South porch, monogram over east window

## The former village school

Marks on the brick wall of the adjacent village hall were noted (Fig. 28). These are reminiscent of grooves cut into the wall of Church Cottage, Basingstoke which are said to have been made by pupils sharpening their slate pencils when the building was a school. It was confirmed that this was the case in Hursley too, and the building had been the village school in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The marks are mentioned in Linda Hewett's book about the school.



*28 "Pencil" sharpening marks on brick wall of former village school adjacent to church*

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank church members for allowing us access to the church and for making us so welcome. Special mention must go to Dawn Morris for helping to set up our visits, Peter Hill who provided us with access to the tower, and stayed on hand during our visit, and to Antonia Stickland for providing invaluable historical background.

## Survey archive

340 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 and with the church and will be made available on the Hampshire Field Club website:

[www.hantsfieldclub.org.uk](http://www.hantsfieldclub.org.uk)

Email: [medieval.graffiti@hantsfieldclub.org.uk](mailto:medieval.graffiti@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.

## **References**

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<https://sundialsoc.org.uk/dials/st-marys-church-23965/>

<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/hants/vol3/pp417-422>

## APPENDIX

Names and dated initials found as graffiti at All Saints' Hursley

Name/Initials	Date	Location
WB	1833	West doorway
WG (?)	1842 (?)	"
WT	1783	" (3 times)
RW	1745	"
NC	178?	"
II	1777	"
GH	17??	"
ID	1779	"
IH	1780	"
CHB	1910	Tower stair below roof
T. Dalley (?) pencil	1910	"
T. Petters		"
M. Michaels		"
JRW, SRP	1917	"
G.I.H.Y	1938	"
Edward Hellinyer (?)		"
Martin Hayes		"
HB, Basingstoke	1910	"
I Jones	1954	"
CR	1902	"
CAS	April 1 1904	"
A Law		"
W Dickson		"
G Griffiths		"
H J Mitchel	1922	"
R Rawlings	1938	"
CR	1887 or 1897(?) July 14th	"
A Stark	1920	"
FID	1770	Bell chamber level
Jl:VI	1616	Window on stair below bell chamber
John Woll	1627	Ringing room entrance arch
John Frost	16?? (erased)	"
John Woll		Stair between ringing room and ground level
Nicholas		Above John Woll name
C Ruge (?)	13 September 1883	Stair between ringing room and ground level
MH	1878	Tower stair ground level
Fanny Jane Warden (?)	1883	"
TC Hallitt		Tower roof lead