

Report from SAS Graffiti Group

We've had a busy time during the autumn 2018: visits to St John's Church, North Baddesley, near Southampton in September, exploring the Wool House, Bugle Street, Southampton in October, and visits to Southampton's medieval vaults within the city walls in November and December.

Church of St John the Baptist, North Baddesley: for our outing in September we had almost a full team, although relatively little graffiti was found. This church is linked to the Knights Hospitallers and is probably an earlier foundation than the 14th/15th century nave and chancel. Later additions date to the 17th century, and it was restored in 19th century. Records were made of the graffiti, including the scratched outline of a hand beside the south doorway, see right; and 23 overlapping circles on a reused king-post in the gallery. The church monuments were recorded by The Arts Society (formerly NADFAS) Church Recording Projects (for more information see: <https://theartsociety.org/church-recording>).



Outline of hand beside doorway. Photo K Wardley



The Wool House/Dancing Man Brewery, Bugle Street, Southampton: two visits were made in October. The two-storey stone warehouse dates to the early 15th century, when Southampton was a major wool exporting port. It has had many other uses, most recently as Southampton's Maritime Museum to 2012, then briefly an art gallery and now is a brewery, pub and restaurant. Dr Ian Friel recorded graffiti and other features in 2013 and gave permission for us to use his report and photographs. The clearly dated graffiti is from 1711 and 1748 and should relate to the Wars of Spanish Succession (1701–14) and Austrian Succession (1740–8). Most examples of graffiti were found on one roof beam at the south end of the first floor: mainly individual names, initials, ship names and dates. Unfortunately, similar beams were removed when the building was converted into a museum. Other graffiti were found scratched in stone on the ground and first floors.

Members of graffiti team recording Wool House graffiti. Photo K Wardley

Vaults visits

Southampton's medieval vaults are well known and popular for guided tours although not all of them are visited much, due to limited accessibility (most have steps) or dark/damp conditions. They generally date from between 12th and 14th centuries and with some exceptions were built as storage areas below substantial merchants' homes and trading premises. The vaults were subsequently used for storage purposes; as troop billets during wartime (High Street vaults); as prisons (St Michael's); also many of them served as WWII air raid shelters, and they are scheduled monuments. It was known that graffiti had been found in several of the vaults but this had not been documented in detail, so the graffiti group has begun a campaign to record them.

Visits were made in November to Nos 93 and 94 High Street, where one example of initials was found in 93. No 94 had a number of marks interpreted as apotropaic or protective, such as a cross, compass-made circles and 'daisy-wheel', arrow and grid-pattern, all near to windows or doors. Graffiti on the roof ribs dated from the 18th century, comprising initials and dates, possibly left by soldiers.

Several vaults in the Lower High Street

Quilters Vault (named after the former landlord of the Royal George Hotel which used to stand above the vault, before it was destroyed in 1940). The date 1988 was engraved below a barred window, on the concrete windowsill, and other marks found were an X and the letters 'I R' with small 's' scratched on string courses.

79½ High Street on the corner of Gloucester Square (formerly below 79 High Street). The only marks found here were a pencilled calculation on the roof of the vault.

88 High Street is located on the West side of the lower end of the High Street, between Porter's Lane and Quilters Vault. Possibly used as a WWII air raid shelter; an escape hatch is fitted in the roof. No graffiti were found here and it may have been damaged by the flaky and mouldy condition of the interior.



Lankester's Vault The graffiti consists mainly of initials, interpreted as mason's marks on ribbed roof supports, on ashlar blocks and on the floor, possibly reused flagstones. The scheduled monument includes a vault to the south, once connected but now inaccessible from Lankester's Vault. A report was consulted on the 1990 archaeological work carried out when a new entrance was constructed.

Examples of masons' marks on ashlar blocks. Photo R James

St Michael's Vault/Prison Vault contains blast walls and traces of benches fitted for its use as an air raid shelter during WWII, and a badly rusted ventilation pump (moved there from the Post Office vault: MG, pers. comm.). The vault was damp and dark, and little graffiti was found: a few incised initials on door posts, and letters on the walls made with spray paint (of recent date).

In December we visited the Undercroft and Castle Vaults: the Undercroft, although well-preserved, revealed few examples of graffiti, which included scratched initials and dates by the fireplace and two window bays, and modern pencil marks.

Castle Vault was built in 12th century as a store for the King's wine (one tenth of all wine imported through Southampton). It was used as an air raid shelter during the Second World War and later as a City Council mason's store. Only two incised and scratched initials with 20th century dates were found, near the south entrance.

Further work

Photographs and notes of the graffiti are held on the Hampshire Medieval Graffiti Project archive, and summaries of most of the above sites on the SAS website www.southamptonarchaeology.uk. We are a small group of ten members and between four and ten of us take part in our visits, usually on Tuesdays from about 10.30am. Starting this month we'll be visiting more vaults and churches in 2019, and we would welcome SAS members to join us – if you're interested please contact me, Sarah Hanna (sarahvhanna@hotmail.com), or Karen Wardley (karenwardley@hotmail.com.)

Sarah Hanna