

Eling, St Mary the Virgin

The survey took place on Tuesday 26th June 2018. Surveyors were seven members of Southampton Archaeology Society.

This church has Saxon origins, evidenced by Saxon gravestones excavated from beneath the church, now stored in the nave, and a narrow window in the north wall of the chancel, and a tiny opening in the south wall of the nave, neither of which can be in their original position. Medieval features include the 12th century nave, late 13th century chancel arch and 14th century 2-bay south arcade. The tower is Tudor and early 17th century. The church was greatly altered by zealous restoration in the 1860s, and porches were added.

Due to the 19th century restoration little medieval graffiti remains in the church. There is a faint compass-drawn circle in the chancel, on the furthest east pillar of the Lady Chapel and a possible X-shaped mason's mark on the east side of the tower entrance.

Most interesting are a number of VV symbols, so-called marian marks, on the south arcade which is dated to the 14th century by Pevsner.

There are 5 of these marks. One theory is that they are masons' marks, but the depth of carving, and the presence of serifs on one set suggests they are votive marks, connected with the worship of the Virgin Mary. However, they are at a height which makes it hard to see how they could have been made.

A number of interesting tombstones have been brought into the church one of which, commemorating Thomas Watson, has had a letter S carved into its lower border.

On the exterior of the church, on the nave north windowsill, there are some initials, now very worn, which could be 18th or 19th century.

Otherwise, the graffiti found was modern. The word "Vampire" was found scratched inside the south porch. This may relate to an incident in 2003 when 3 people, claiming to be reincarnated vampires, were found guilty of harassing the vicar and his family and banned from the churchyard, later receiving prison sentences.



St. Mary's Church, Eling, Hampshire



West Porch



Marian marks



18th or 19th century initials



Tombstone of Thomas Watson, now in the church



21st century controversy