

# Holy Trinity church, Millbrook, Southampton

## Historical graffiti report

Hampshire Medieval Graffiti Project



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**Survey dates:** 10<sup>th</sup> November 2022, 8<sup>th</sup> March and 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023

**OS Grid Ref:** SU 384131

**Postcode:** SO15 0SD

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## **Brief History of Holy Trinity church, Millbrook, Southampton**

The church is a significant landmark when approaching the city from the west. Holy Trinity replaced the medieval church of St Nicholas that was situated at the junction of Regents Park Road and Millbrook Road.

The present building was designed by Henry Woodyear (1816-1896) and was built between 1872-1874 with the very prominent spire completed in 1882. Later additions were made in a high Anglican style with a classical baldacchino or ciborium of 1934 designed by Niniam Comper, over the high altar. The south chapel interior was also designed by Comper as a first World War memorial and is dedicated to St George. The Hardman and Co. stained glass windows survived war time bombing. The church contained two Titanic memorials, now held within the museum collections of Southampton City Council.

The church is now surrounded by industrial estates and is very close to the busy main road. It is being considered for redundancy, having virtually no Anglican congregation, and used by other denominations.

### **General remarks**

The team was alerted to the presence of significant World War II graffiti in the bell ringing chamber by Frank Green, member of the Diocesan Advisory Committee. Three survey visits were consequently made, to record this piece of graffiti and any other graffiti present. The church ground floor interior and exterior were surveyed on the first visit, and the bell ringing chamber on the second and third visit. Names left as graffiti which included surnames have been listed, with dates if given, and are attached as an appendix to this report.

### **Method**

The survey of the church was undertaken in natural light conditions. There was no electric lighting in the tower. The graffiti was examined visually using a raking light source. Individual or groups of marks were recorded, using a digital camera. Field survey notes were recorded. Images were then transferred to a computer where further enhanced identifications and recording were made. A total of 169 images were taken (some of them general views of locations inside and outside the church).

## Graffiti summary and discussion

### Church ground floor interior and exterior

This area was surveyed on 10 November 2022. A very small amount of graffiti was found on the organ casing and on the book rest of the north pew at the rear of the nave. Names and initials are penciled or scratched into the wood. Some names are dated, eg R. Boswell 1923 on the organ casing. The dates 1936 and 1948 are found on the book rest.

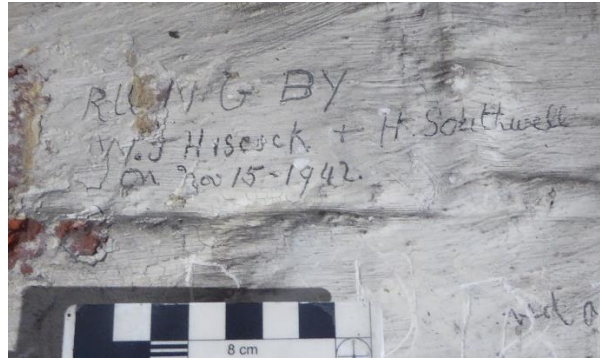
At the east end of the north aisle, screwed into the underside of the altar stone, is a plywood sheet with “St Nicholas church Millbrook” marked on it in pencil, presumably indicating that it came from the earlier church.

### The tower ringing chamber



*1 The bell ringing chamber in the tower.*

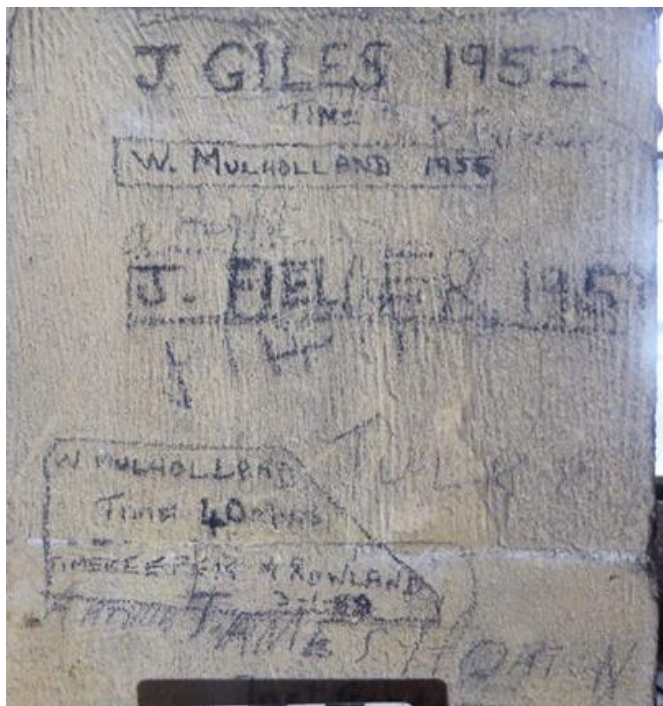
This area was surveyed over two visits, in March and May 2023. All four walls are covered in graffiti, apparently left by the bell ringers. The graffiti is scratched and penciled on the stone windowsills and jambs and the plastered walls. It consists mainly of names, initials and dates, and over 50 names with surnames are listed in the appendix to this report. The earliest dated full name is P. Lynch, 27.9.1916, on the north wall. The earliest dated initials are RB 1915. When only first initials are given we don't know the gender of the maker, but while male names predominate, female names occur among the later inscriptions.



2 Bells rung in commemoration of El Alamein

Ropes for ringing the bells are located on the north wall, within a wooden frame (Fig 1), and it is here that the significant World War II pencil graffiti, is located. It says “Rung by W. J Hiscock + H. Southwell on Nov 15 1942”. (Fig 2). Church bells had been silenced early on in the war as they would be used to warn of any invasion, but a special dispensation was allowed to celebrate the victory at El Alamein, a turning point in the hostilities, so the bell ringers recorded this historic event.

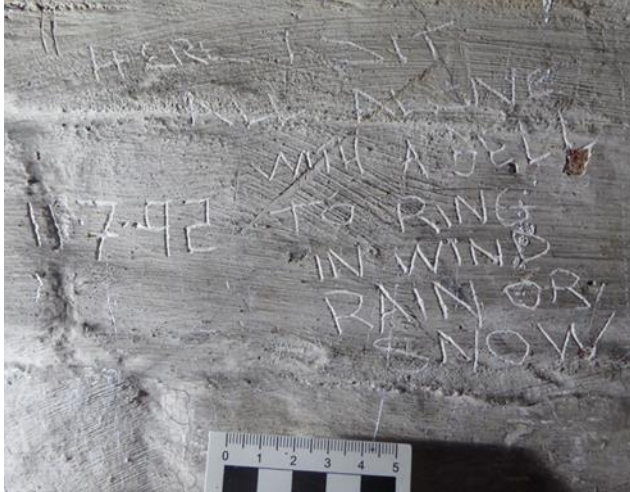
There are many references in the graffiti to the bell ringers, and records of ringing contests which involved a timekeeper (Fig 3).



3 Record of timed ringing contest

Columns of numbers near the 4 bell ropes, which were numbered, presumably record particular peals.

Sometimes bell ringers became pensive “Here I sit, all alone, with a bell to ring in wind, rain or snow” (Fig 4).



4 Thoughts of a bell ringer

When not employed ringing the bells, the bell ringers amused themselves with occupations such as playing noughts and crosses or recording contemporary characters from popular culture.



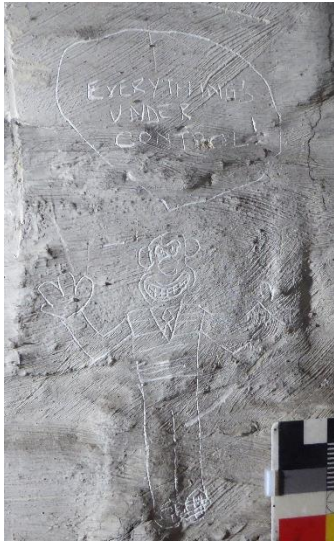
5 Chad

The wartime character Chad is portrayed three times, once saying "Wot, only 4 bells?" (Fig 5).



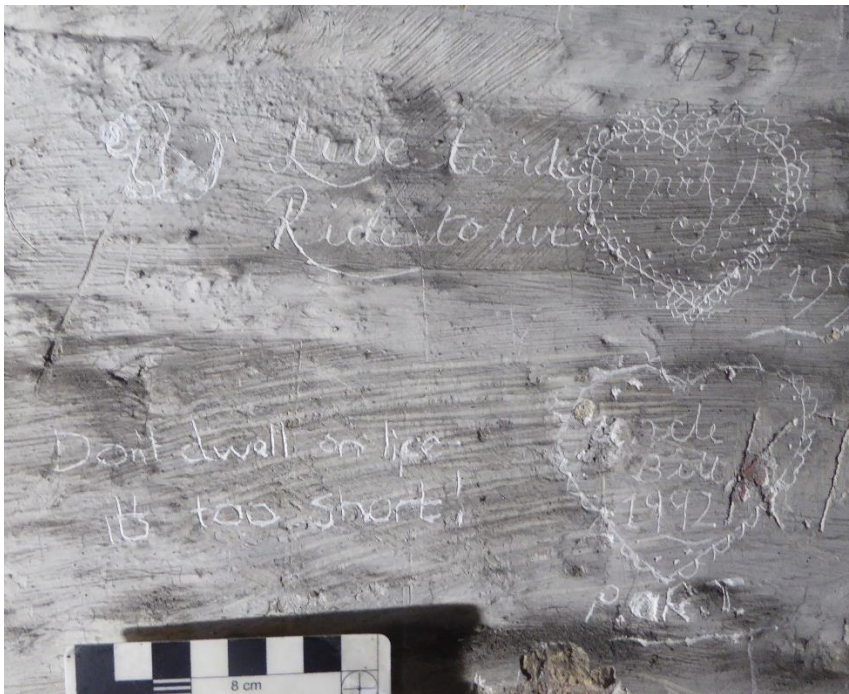
6 Mr Man

A Mr Man appears, dated 1997 (Fig 6), as does another 1990s character, Wallace of Wallace and Gromit fame, saying "Everything's under control!" (Fig 7).



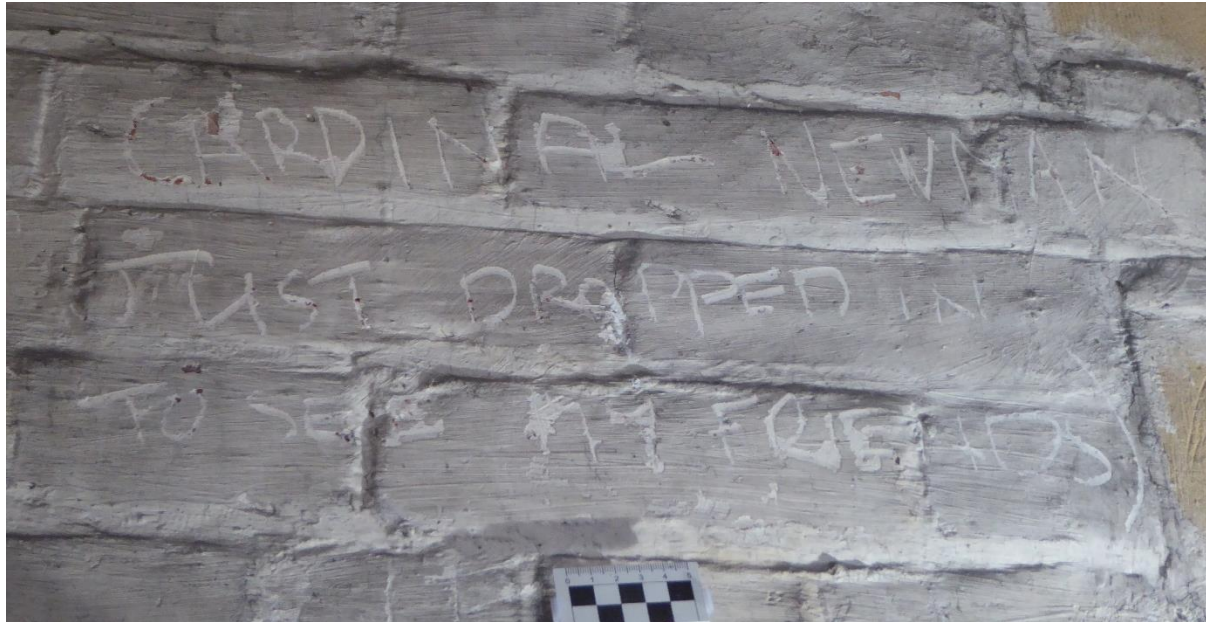
7 Wallace

A rock music fan has inscribed the band name Status Quo and there is reference to motor biking "Live to ride. Ride to live.". Some reveal a philosophical streak with lines such as "Don't dwell on life. It's too short", next to some names within elaborately decorated hearts (Fig 8)..



8 Various musings

Some of the ringers had a sense of humour and vivid imaginations, for example leaving a message allegedly by Cardinal Newman: “Just dropped in to see my friends” (Fig 9). This, and “Up the Papacy!” could be evidence for High Church leanings.



*9 Cardinal Newman. Just dropped in*

There is also a lengthy inscription recording that Princess Diana rang the bells here to celebrate the wedding of her brother to Princess Anne – a strange amalgamation of royal events. Such inscriptions could raise the question of how much of the ancient graffiti that we find is an accurate record of contemporary events.

To summarise, the graffiti here provides an unexpected insight into the people connected with Holy Trinity, especially those who were the bell ringers. Not only are their names recorded, but also inscriptions revealing interests, feelings and beliefs.

Karen Wardley

HMGP Co-ordinator

24<sup>th</sup> May 2023

## **Acknowledgements**

Our thanks go to Veronica Petch who, with her husband, opened up the church and the tower for us on each visit. Thanks also to Frank Green for alerting us to the wartime graffiti and for providing reference to the silencing of church bells during the Second World War.

## **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**

The Buildings of England. Hampshire: South. Charles O'Brien, Bruce Bailey, David Lloyd and Nikolaus Pevsner (2018)



## APPENDIX 1

### Holy Trinity, Millbrook, Southampton. Names found as graffiti within the building.

#### Church tower. Ringing chamber.

Most names were found here, presumably left by bell ringers.

Name	Associated date(s)	Occurrences
Anderson, Caroline	1.7.1995, 22.6.1996	2
Attwood, Wayne	1989	1
Baker, David	Dec 24 1965	2
Budd, T	1956	1
Cox, F	1916 (?)	1
Cox, W	1916 (?)	1
Crook, Michael	1961, 1962	2
Dibden, Paul		1
Druff, B		1
Fielder, J	1951	2
Fray, John	Dec 7 1919	1
Geddes, M	13 May 1962, 1.4.1962 1 April 1962	3
Giles, J	1952	1
Glasspool, Charles and Stan	Dec 24 1965	1
Godwin, RC		1
Gordon, Phil	11.9.82	1
Goulden, G	3.1.1923	1
Gover, W		1
Gregory, Nick	12 Jan 1986	1
Hann, J	1936, 1939	4
Harmon, P	1967	1
Hayward, S		2
Hiscock MJ	15 Nov 1942	1
Holloway, D		1
Horton, James		1
Knight, A		1
Larbalestter, L (?)		1
Lawrence, B	1918	1
Lynch, P	27 Sept 1916	1
111Mulholland, W	1956	1
Murphy, Rex		1
Penrose, Laura (age 10)	1996	2
Phippard, TE	1953	1
Robins, John		1
Rowland, Michael	1956	2
Rowland, M	3 <sup>rd</sup> Jan 1959, 3 <sup>rd</sup> March 1961, 1956	5
Rowland, Miss		1

Saunders, J	1952	1
Smith, C	3.1.1923	1
Snell, Sonia	1970	1
Southwell, H	15 Nov 1942, Same as HS 1.1.31?	2
Spears, EH		1
Thompson, F(?)	196?	1
Thornton, Dickie	1963	1
Wilmarsh, Dave		1
Whitmarsh, David (16)	21.8.82	1

### Names found in main body of church

Name	Associated date	Location	Occurrences
Boswell, R	9 <sup>th</sup> June 1923	Organ casing	1
Duff, Basil		Rear pew book rest	1
Harper, M	Same as MH 1948?	Rear pew book rest	1
Nobes, SE	4 <sup>th</sup> Oct 1936	Rear pew book rest Organ casing	2
Oliver, George		Rear pew book rest	1

Approximately 50 names in total, earliest dated name is P. Lynch 27.9.1916.