

The priory church of St Andrew the Apostle, Hamble-le-Rice - historical graffiti report

Southampton Archaeology Society



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Brief history of the priory church of St Andrew the Apostle, Hamble-le-Rice

A small priory was established here between 1109 and 1128 by a cell of Benedictine monks from the abbey of Tiron, near Chartres in France. It was probably already run-down before being suppressed with other “alien” priories in 1391, after which it was acquired by William of Wykeham who repaired and rebuilt the church as an endowment for Winchester College. The original church consisted of a parochial nave and monastic chancel with a western tower. The tower was repaired or rebuilt in 1410-1411, and the north porch was added in 1402. Archaeological excavations have revealed monastic ranges to the north and south of the building, whose existence is also testified by blocked openings in the fabric of the building. Major works were carried out during the 19th century, and the Lady Chapel was added in 1880 to provide extra seating and to house the organ. A major extension, the Priory Centre, was added in 1990, to act as a community centre for the village.

Graffiti summary and discussion

While modern graffiti is looked on as destructive and disfiguring, in the past graffiti was more accepted and often a way for those whose voice was not usually heard to express themselves. The graffiti at St Andrew’s provides a rich historical record as well as demonstrating how important the church was to its local parishioners. It was a way of expressing hopes and fears, or of commenting on local events, as well as a simple record of a person’s presence. The following discussion looks at the concentrations of graffiti in different areas of the building.

The north porch. At St Andrew’s, a significant amount of graffiti is found within the porch around the north doorway, but by far the most impressive collection is on the outer face of the **wooden door into the porch.** (Fig 1)



1 North door

This door was moved from the inside to its present position in the 1960s so may well be earlier than the porch itself, which was built in 1402. The door consists of 8 vertical oak panels, held in place with iron studs, and has openings for at least 5 different keyholes. It is covered with graffiti, most of which is in a band about a metre high, running across the central part of the door, although there is a small area of graffiti lower down on the west side. The inner face of the door is covered by a modern timber support, obscuring any graffiti which might be there.

The graffiti consists of numerous crosses and other lines and geometric shapes scratched into the wood. (Fig 2)



2 North door. Crosses and geometric shapes

Local sources say that the graffiti was made by local fishermen who would make a mark on the door before going out to sea, then cross their previous mark to record their safe return. In his book, Robinson even gives the names of two men, one of whom died in 1932, who made such marks. He also says that Royal Navy sailors left marks, involving triangles and circles, denoting which fleet they had served in. These stories are well known within the village, no doubt based on local oral testimony although there is, as far as we are aware, no documentary evidence for this practice.

A preponderance of crosses around church doorways is also often attributed to pilgrims, and is another possible explanation given in the church guidebook.

Detailed examination of the door graffiti certainly revealed many crosses, single lines and triangular shapes, which would bear out these stories. However, there are also a variety of other and more elaborate shapes, suggesting there may be a number of different reasons why these marks were made.

Some crosses, the predominant Christian symbol, may represent personal acts of devotion, prayers offered up by those entering the church, and not just for a safe sea voyage.

There are asterisk shapes, with 6 and 8 arms. (Fig 3) The latter is sometimes known as a baptismal cross and is another recognised Christian symbol.



3 North door. Shapes including 8-armed asterisk

There is also a pentagram, a five-pointed star which represents the five wounds of Christ in Christian iconography. (Fig 4)



4 North door. Pentagram

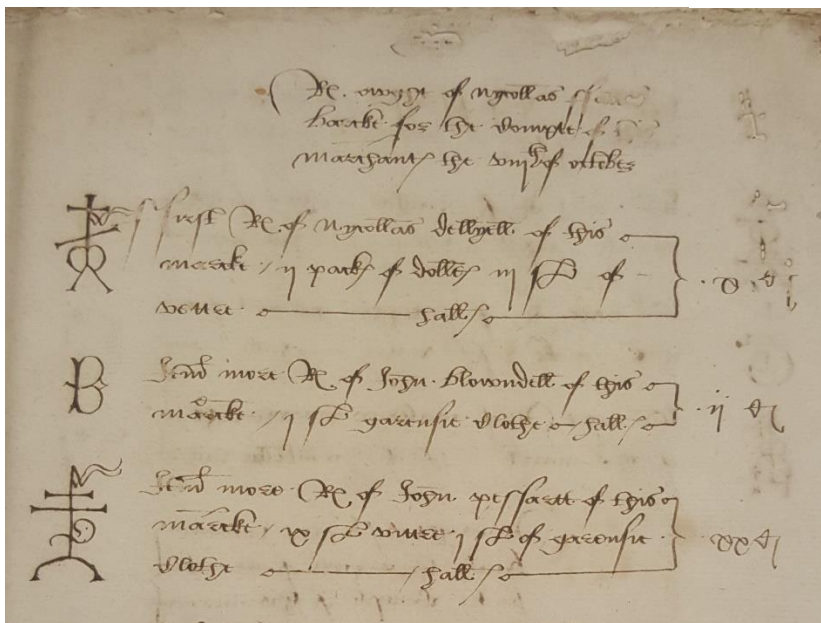
Other more elaborate shapes resemble medieval merchant marks. (Figs 5, 6)
 These marks were used to identify the goods of individual traders and are also often used as personal marks in place of signatures or initials in contemporary documents, for example in Southampton's Linen Hall Book 1544-5, held by Southampton City Archives. (Fig 7)



5 North door. Marks including triangles and circle



6 North door. Possible merchant mark



7 Southampton Linen Hall Book 1544-5. Examples of merchant marks

Other shapes occur, for example resembling an hourglass (Fig 8) and a “hache” shape (Fig 9).

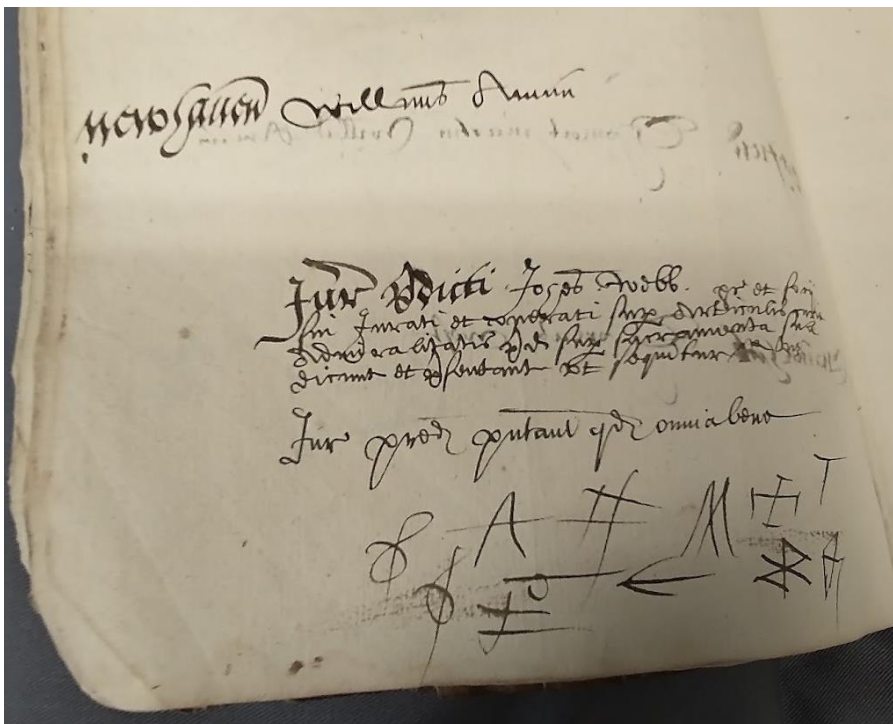


8 North door. Geometric hourglass shapes



9 North door. “Hache “ shape

It is interesting to compare the personal marks left by jurors attending the Admiralty Courts of the 16th century, some of which were held in Hamble. The jurors, often fishermen or boat owners, were illiterate and could not write their names, so left a mark in place of their name at the end of the presentments recorded. (Fig 10)



10 Admiralty Court Book, 1566-1585, f36v. Jurors' marks

Some of the marks look very similar to the marks on the church door, which leads us to speculate that perhaps the marks represented specific individuals, and the marks were left on the door as later, literate people might leave their initials or names. Interestingly, there are no initials on this door, suggesting the graffiti was made pre-Reformation, as initials become one

of the most common forms of graffiti from the mid sixteenth century onwards when more people were literate, or could at least write their own names. Certainly these marks seem to represent a centuries-old tradition within the village, demonstrating how people whose voices may otherwise have gone unheard could use graffiti to record their hopes and beliefs.

There is one set of initials, *IL*, on the stonework to the west of the door, inside the porch. The form of the initial *I* (which was also used to represent the initial *J*) with a central horizontal bar, suggests a date of the 16th or 17th century. (Fig 11)



11 North porch interior, west of doorway. Initials IL

The north doorway has crosses and angular shapes around it similar to those found on the wooden door. There are also some initials, for example *HC*, on the east side.

Within the porch, on the east wall, is part of a memorial tablet, dated to 1st April 1628. The stone is incomplete as the name of the person commemorated is missing. It was probably originally on the floor of the church. The inscription reads:

D(E)SESED THE . 1 . DA Y

ANNO OF APREL
(DO)MIN (I) 1628

The letter *S* forms are reversed. There is a vertical line separating the 2 halves of the lower part of the inscription (Fig 12)



12 North porch interior, east wall. Memorial tablet, incomplete, 1628

The Chancel

There is some modern graffiti carefully scratched into the stonework on the east side of the vestry doorway. It reads AVE M, presumably intended to be Ave Maria, but the inscriber may have been interrupted. (Fig 13)



13 Chancel, east of vestry doorway. Ave M, possibly intended to be Ave Maria

The organ casing. The church organ, originally installed in the Lady Chapel in 1880 was repaired and moved into its current position in the chancel in 1946. The casing has a lot of graffiti on it, mainly dating from the 1920s to the 1940s, and was probably made by the young men tasked with pumping air into the organ before electricity performed this function. There are also drawings, including one of a horse-drawn carriage, and other shapes. (Fig 14) The names recorded here would provide a useful resource for local historians and family researchers.



14 Church organ casing, east side, middle panel. Drawing of horse-drawn carriage

The pews. A very small amount of graffiti was found scratched through the black varnish on the pews, dating it to post-1946.

The church exterior

Some initials and parts of names were found on the east and west walls of **the vestry**. The guidebook says that the vestry was rebuilt in 1912 of stone” from an old wall in the grounds of Wolvesey Palace, Winchester” and that these initials were carved by boys from Winchester College. (Fig 15)



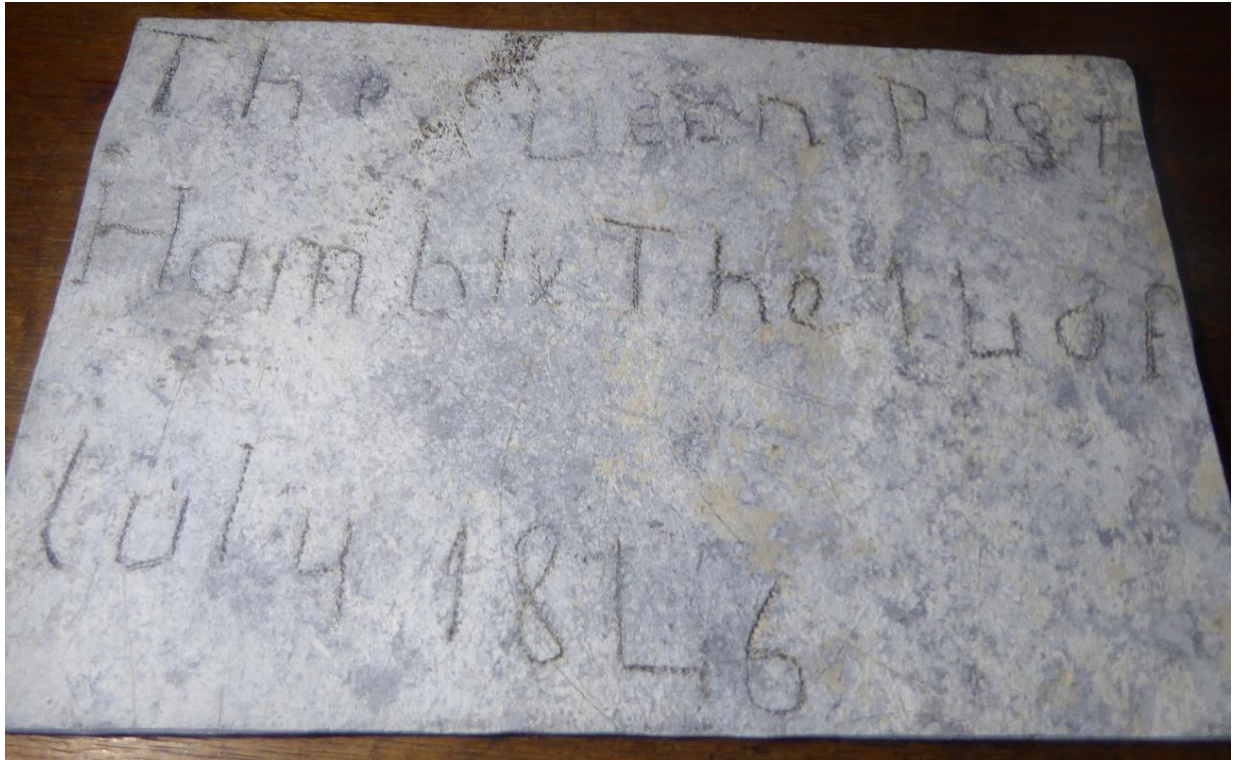
This explains why some of the initials are at right angles as they are on reused stones.

15 Vestry wall exterior, west side. Fragments of graffiti on reused stone from Winchester

High up, on the east side of **the tower**, are the initials GF and W.

Tower roof lead

We were very pleased to be shown two fine graffiti inscriptions on lead sheets, which had been rescued from the tower roof when it was being repaired and replaced. These items are currently stored in the vestry. One is a record made by someone who had seen Queen Victoria passing by Hamble on July 14th, 1846, when the royal party was making its way to Osborne House on the Isle of Wight on the Ferry Steam Yacht. (Fig 16) With the lead sheet is a typewritten label with a quote from the Hampshire Telegraph of July 18th, 1846, reporting on this event.



16 Lead sheeting from tower roof. "The Queen past Hamble the 14 of July 1846"

Another inscription consists of a man's shoe sole and the name J Betteridge, with the date 1830. (Fig 17)



17 Lead sheeting from tower roof. Shoe sole, J. Betteridge 1830

Shoe soles are often found as graffiti motifs, and may represent a personal mark left by someone, perhaps even suggesting their trade. Winchester Westgate contains graffiti made by a leather worker, John Burton, who was held there in 1738 when it was a debtors' prison. As well as his name he inscribed drawings of a leather worker's "palm" and a square-toed boot sole, representing his profession. Another possibility is that this might be a play on words, with the shoe sole representing the human soul, so perhaps this is a memorial for J Betteridge, indicating a prayer for his soul? A study of local records might help identify him and his dates and thus clarify this.

We are grateful for the foresight of those who rescued and preserved these inscriptions.

Turret clock casing Within the tower is the clock room which houses a turret clock. The clock was built by J.B. Joyce & Co of Whitchurch, Salop in 1878. On the inside of the clock case doors the clock repairers have left dated records, written in pencil, of the works they have carried out. (Fig 18)



18 Tower. Turret clock case door with pencilled repair records

One of our survey team, Julian Porter, has researched the clock and bells held in the tower, and a separate report is available.

Other marks

Marks which were made during the construction of the building were also recorded, although these are not officially “graffiti”. These include some masons’ marking out lines within the stone archway on the south side of the nave. (Fig 19)



19 Nave, south side. Masons’ marking-out lines on archway

Two mass dials, relocated within the fabric of the tower, are mentioned in the church guidebook, although one of these is now obscured by the Priory Centre roof.

Early paint. A record was also made of traces of a red painted scroll design on the west side of the north window in the chancel. (Fig 20) These traces show that the interior of the church would have been brightly painted before church authorities passed legislation during the Reformation requiring that papish decorative features such as wall paintings had to be removed from parish churches.



20 Chancel. West side of north window. Red painted scroll decoration

Survey archive

162 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.

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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