

St Mary's church, Breamore, Hampshire: Historical Graffiti Report

Southampton Archaeology Society



Date of survey: 15th August 2022

Surveyors: Sue and Derek Stewart, Joan and Brian Webb, Karen Wardley, Sarah Hanna and Julian Porter.

Post code: SP6 2DF OS Grid Ref: SU153189 Coordinates: 50°58'09"N 1°46'59"W

Church Heritage Record No: 641193

St. Mary's church, Breamore: a brief description

Breamore was founded in Saxon times as a Minster church on a possible Royal estate set within a large enclosure. It served as the mother church for several nearby villages until the mid 12th century when it became, and remains today, Breamore's parish church. The village is recorded in the Domesday Survey as being owned by the king.

The design of the building dates it to the end of the 10th or beginning of the 11th century, although it is of a particularly large size for this period. It is typically cruciform shape consisting of nave, crossing (with tower above) north and south porticus (chapels) - instead of the more usual transepts - and chancel. The nave was lit by four narrow splayed windows (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1

The external walls are flint and daub with reused Roman brick and stone set into it in some places. There are stone quoins with long and short work at the corners and several pilaster strips. The tower was probably wooden and may have originally had three stages.

In the mid-12th century, a south porch was added with an Agnus Dei roundel. Further remodelling took place in the 14th century and the north porticus was demolished a century later. In the 16th century the Saxon Rood, which had been re-sited to an external position above the south porch, was now enclosed by raising the porch roof. The wall paintings around the Rood and on the other walls were added at this time. Later the same century, during the Reformation, the medieval wall paintings behind the altar (Figs. 2 & 3) were whitewashed over & statues of saints destroyed.



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

The Rood loft above the chancel arch was removed although the door to it is still visible. The stone relief of the Saxon Rood, probably then sited in the demolished west chamber was chiselled off (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4

The church previously dedicated to St. Michael was rededicated to St. Mary. Further alterations were made in the 19th century when the gallery was added, and the organ installed (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5

This ancient church has retained many of its original features including the arch of the south porticus with its unusual inscription in Old English (not Latin) “**HER SWUTELATH SEO GECWYDRAEDNES THE**”. The translation is debated but the version given by the church guide is “Here is manifested the word to thee” (Fig. 6). Another small part of an inscription survives above the chancel arch on its west face.



Fig. 6

Graffiti summary and discussion

The exterior

Very little early graffiti was found within the church, no doubt due to the many alterations that have taken place to the fabric. The most significant concentrations of older graffiti are found on the exterior, on two adjacent stone blocks on the west side of the porch. These are covered with initials, many dating to the late 17th century. 1694 occurs more than once, associated with different sets of initials. Traditionally, the church porch was where parish business was carried out so these dated initials could mark a significant local event. Other features, not officially graffiti, were also recorded, including two mass dials and an Ordnance Survey benchmark.



Fig. 7 is a stone block on the west corner of the south face of the porch and shows dated initials IH 1694, AB 1679, SE 1694, boxed initials TC and other initials.

Fig. 7



Below it is a further stone block (Fig. 8) with similar graffiti of WP 1694, IH, and a circular pattern of dots and lines resembling a small Mass dial or sundial.

Fig. 8

High on the west side of the porch is a relocated Mass dial, heavily weathered (Fig. 9).

Fig. 9



On the west face of the block shown in Fig. 7 is further graffiti (Fig. 10) showing another series of dots and letters. The dots may have acted as guides for drawing letters and other shapes, and some of the initials shown in Fig. 7 have dots at their terminals.

Fig. 10



And on the west face of the block shown in Fig.8 is additional graffiti (Fig. 11) with more dots and letters, heavily weathered.

Fig. 11

Low down on the west face of the porch is a deeply engraved Ordnance Survey benchmark which would have been added in the 1840s or later (Fig. 12). Its location is shown on the 1871 and 1897 Six Inch maps at a height of 166.1 ft (50.63m) above mean sea level.

Fig. 12



Fig. 13 shows an unusual graffito of unknown date on the northeast face of the south west buttress. It is the letters APL within a shield shape surround. Below the shield is a small oval shape with three short rays coming from its base. To the right of the shield there is a small heart shape laid on its side. Whether all these were created at the same time is, of course, unknown.

Fig. 13

Continuing around the church, on the north east face of the north west buttress are two deeply incised crosses with serifs on the lower three arms and a hook shape resembling the open top of a letter P carved on the top arm of each. (Fig. 14). These symbols are known as staurograms, combining the Greek letters Tau and Rho, and are a Christian symbol representing the crucifixion. They are similar to the more common Chi Rho symbols, but much more unusual as graffiti. The symbol on the right may be an earlier cross which has been altered to copy the symbol on the left. The terminals of the cross arms are different: dots on one, serifs on the other, suggesting they were made by different hands.



Fig. 14



On the south side frame of the most easterly window on the north side of the church are two short vertical scratches, below which are more horizontal double scratches with angled doubled scratches. The purpose of these, or what they were intended to portray, is not known (Fig. 15).

Fig. 15

Moving to the east end of the tower, the east face of the buttress has a set of initials and a date which, although deeply cut, is badly weathered and not particularly clear. It is believed to show the letters CW with a date of 1903 below (Fig. 16).



Fig. 16



On the north wall of the chancel in the west side frame of a blocked window is a simple scratched diagonal cross. It may have been made in what appears to be plaster whilst still wet. (Fig. 17).

Fig. 17



On the north side of the chancel, another stone carries carved initials and a date, this time of HE 1906 (Fig. 18).

Fig. 18

Low down on the west door jamb of the door on the south side of the chancel is a small well carved cross with each arm having serifs, the upper arm being slightly longer than the rest (Fig. 19). This is likely to be a votive cross.



Fig. 19

Higher on the same door jamb is a crudely scratched cross with all four arms themselves being crossed (Fig. 20). This form of cross is known as a crosslet cross, and again may be votive.



Fig. 20



High on the east face of the south porticus in the south corner is a deeply carved letter F. Now badly weathered it has become less distinct (Fig. 21).

Fig. 21

On the south face of south porticus in the east corner is another Mass dial, again heavily weathered (Fig. 22).



Fig. 22

The interior

The organ gallery

Inside the church, there is much recent graffiti on the south side of the organ casing, providing a valuable resource for local family historians and researchers. Not every piece of graffiti was photographed, but a written record was made of the names found.

The church guidebook tells us that the gallery at the west end of the church dates from 1852, and the organ was installed there in 1897. Graffiti was found on the windowsill of the south window next to the wooden staircase going up to the gallery, suggesting that this graffiti was made after 1852. It consists of pairs of initials, and an unidentifiable geometric shape (Fig. 23).



Fig. 23

At the top of the stairs are wooden banisters where people have left their names, sometimes with dates. These include C. James 1911, I Mussell 1950 and Mary Young 1960. One name has been altered and could read Harry or Jacky Blanden (Fig. 24).



Fig. 24

On the south side of the organ is the pump handle which was used to blow air into the organ, before the introduction of electricity. Young men of the village would usually act as pumpers and during times of inactivity, perhaps during a lengthy sermon, they would write their names, sometimes with dates and/or addresses, on the wooden organ casing. This is a valuable resource for local and family historians. David Frowd left his name and list of dates in 1946 and 1947, when presumably he was on organ duty. (Fig. 25).



Fig. 25

Some of the family names found here are repeated on the various memorials within the church, showing the families' long association with the church. For example, a plaque commemorating a church peal rung in 1967 includes bellringers with names of Mussell and Dymott, names which are found on the organ casing. Norman William Dymott records that he was the Clerk's son, and EHJ Mussell, a sidesman, although no date is given.

Sometimes, more information about an individual is recorded, for example that Reg Ings received the DCM on March 4th, 1916. We were relieved to find that Reg survived the Great War, as his name appears on the Roll of Honour (Fig. 26), as does that of Edward Young, who recorded his discharge from the army in March 1923.



Fig. 26

Someone else, whose name is unfortunately illegible, recorded that he had been an organ blower for 45 years (Fig. 27).

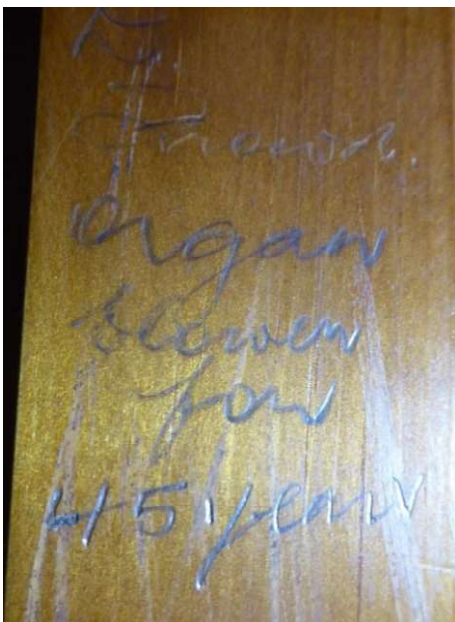


Fig. 27

Sometimes events are recorded, including the memorial service held in the church in 1915 for Captain Sir Edward Hulse, who died in action in the Great War and who is recorded at the head of the Great War Memorial. He is also commemorated by a fine stained-glass window in the nave.



Fig. 28

Happier events also took place, and wedding bells containing pairs of initials appear (Fig. 28), as do pairs of names, perhaps representing other happy couples. One such name, another member of the local Mussell family, is Mr J Mussell, whose name is paired with that of Miss JM Boulton.



Fig. 29

Two Americans left their names: William Bendix from California, and someone with the surname Meery from Langdon, North Dakota (Fig. 29). Perhaps they were stationed near here during the Second World War? There is also a fine “Kilroy woz ere” (Fig. 30), inscribed over the top of and therefore later than a name dated 1946.

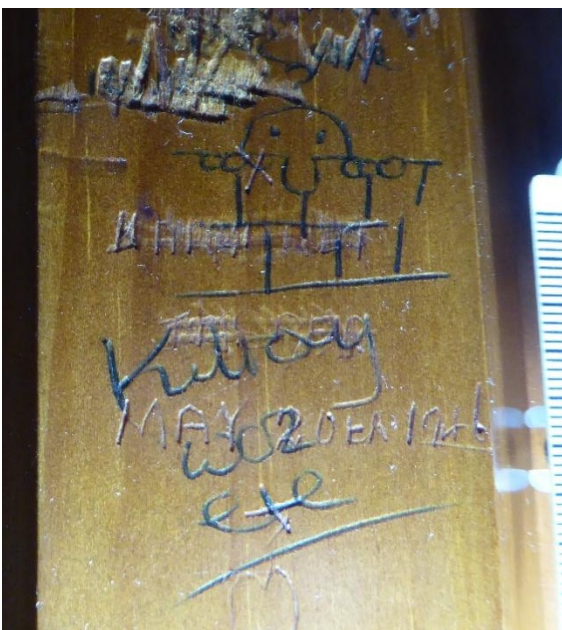


Fig. 30

There is also a fine representation of a bicycle (Fig. 31).



Fig. 31

The Vestry

More recent graffiti was found in the vestry, around the east doorway. This consists of pencil markings, perhaps made to guide the construction of the door arch, with lines and circles at the edges of the individual blocks (Fig. 32).

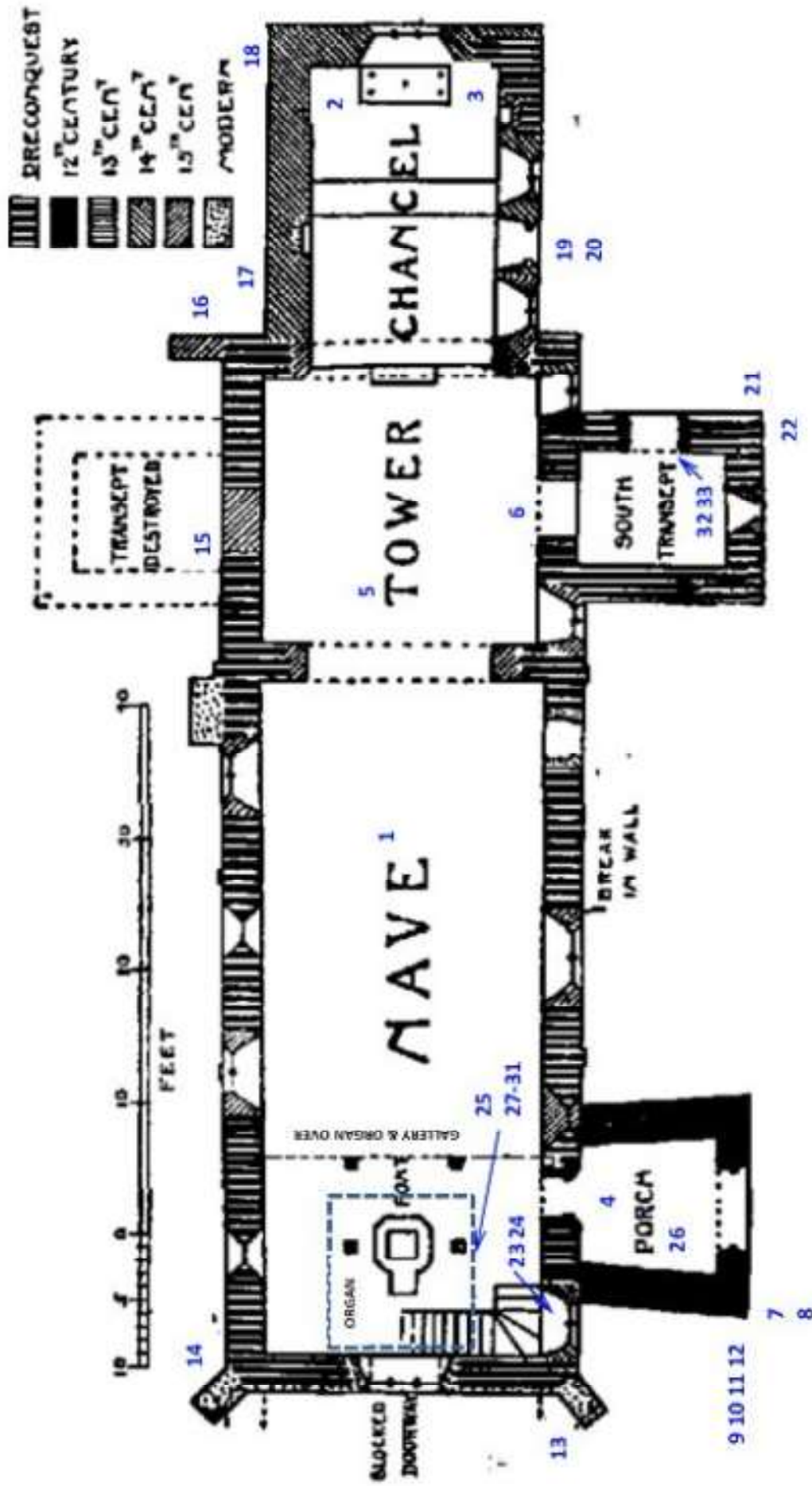


Fig. 32

Two vertical lines incised into the keystone of the door arch may be a mason's original marking out lines (Fig. 33).



Fig. 33



St. Mary's, Breamore

Plan showing positions of photographs

Survey archive

140 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 Southampton Archaeology Society and Hampshire Field Club websites

www.southamptonarchaeology.uk

www.hantsfieldclub.org.uk

Email: medieval.graffiti@hantsfieldclub.org.uk

Acknowledgement

HMGP is grateful to Avon Valley Churches and the church warden for allowing access to the church.

Sources

Champion, Matthew (2015) *The Lost Voices of England's Churches*

Light, Anthony and Ponting, Gerald, (2004) *The Saxon Church of St. Mary's, Breamore. A short history, plan and walk-round guide*

O'Brien C, Bailey B, Lloyd D W, Pevsner N, (2018), *The Buildings of England, Hampshire: South.*

The Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, <http://www.ascorpus.ac.uk>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Staurogram>

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.

Brian Webb and Karen Wardley

17th September 2022