

Post-Dissolution Graffiti in Winchester Cathedral *Report of SAS Lecture September 2022.*

The meeting began with one minute's silence to mark the death of HM Queen Elizabeth 2.

The speaker, Dr Cindy Wood of Winchester University told us she had a degree in history and archaeology and she is most interested in church history and architecture. Each year a group of her students are involved in a photographic survey of the cathedral recording a snapshot (long exposure), of the current state of graffiti there. They are looking at 'informal' marks made by individuals, not mason's marks, and they use no measurements or tapes. The students are encouraged to undertake research using their observations in working towards their degree.

Why were the marks made?

- These are unofficial marks, made by ordinary people who had no other memorial: official memorials and tombs in the cathedral are for the elite, clergy, aristocracy and local landowners.
- Possibly out of boredom during long religious services - graffiti is often decorative.
- Opportunity – all the graffiti discovered is from the time after the cathedral ceased to be a Benedictine Priory, when its use was no longer confined to the closed monastic community, and entry by then was not controlled or strictly supervised.

Fewer marks are found in the oldest areas of the cathedral, for instance in the transepts and presbytery, sacred areas restricted to the priesthood. Little building work has been carried out since the sixteenth century, and most graffiti is found in areas with certain types of stone. Surveys have so far been completed in the South nave aisle and Crypt. Graffiti dating to WW2 has been found in the west stairs and roof space, where there was better access during the 20th century. Building sequence may be correlated with building changes.

Examples of graffiti

The earliest dateable graffiti is from 1545 - a bell ringer scratched his name on a column at the corner of the choir: "Harey Coppard". Nearby are other names: "Thomas Butte, George Butte, Thomas Makrim" (joining dots), who could be bell ringers, or singers. In the Choir and Retrochoir the words "FESTUM PENTECOSTUM" are enclosed in a drawn triangle shape.



From Elizabeth 1's reign, about the 1580s and into the 1800s, the building was neglected and uncared for especially during Parliamentary rule (1649 to 1660), when policing was less rigorous. Priests were described as 'papist', 'liars' and 'flatterer' (early 18th century). Areas with few or no graffiti may be linked with building works, and most military memorials are found in the south nave, where a number of flags are displayed. In the north aisle there is no area without graffiti, except around Jane Austen's memorial.

Image of two names dated 1603: "George Kinge" with "Thomas Bathe" scratched below a line, with other lines and marks.
Photo: S Hanna

The initials “I C” or “J C” are very common; and overlapping “VV” symbols or ‘marian marks’, meaning ‘Virgin of Virgins’, some of which are deeply cut. Protective marks such as ‘hexfoils’ are also frequently found (see image below left). The righthand image could be confused with a “VV” symbol, but was probably a fancy set of initials (KW pers. com.)



*Incised initials, overlapping “WW”, with date 1737.
Photo S Hanna*

*Left: Example of multiple compass drawn six-petaled rosettes or ‘hexfoils’, thought to protect against evil spirits (possibly 17th cent.)
Photo S Hanna*



*Right: Image of a crown with five crosses, and name “William Walter”, enclosed in a building shape; name “MICHAEL” below.
Photo S Hanna*

As indicated above, graffiti is present throughout Winchester Cathedral, for instance around and within the Chantry Chapels, which were built in the Renaissance style, with many plain spaces filled with graffiti - some from modern visitors eg from Ecuador and Mexico 2011. In the West Tower are 20th century examples of cartoon drawings in pencil. The bell ringers’ chamber is full of graffiti made on wood and stone from late 18th century, even in the bell ‘chamber’. On the tower roof is graffiti thought to have been made by WW2 firewatchers.

The style of graffiti reflects changes in the way the cathedral was regarded by lay people: up to the 1540s this was an enclosed precinct; followed by a period of neglect through 16th, 17th and 18th centuries; with greater access possible during the 20th century. These marks indicate a deep-seated need for people to bring their names into the building as a memorial of their lives. The study of this graffiti is a work in progress growing year by year, and will become a valuable resource for future research.

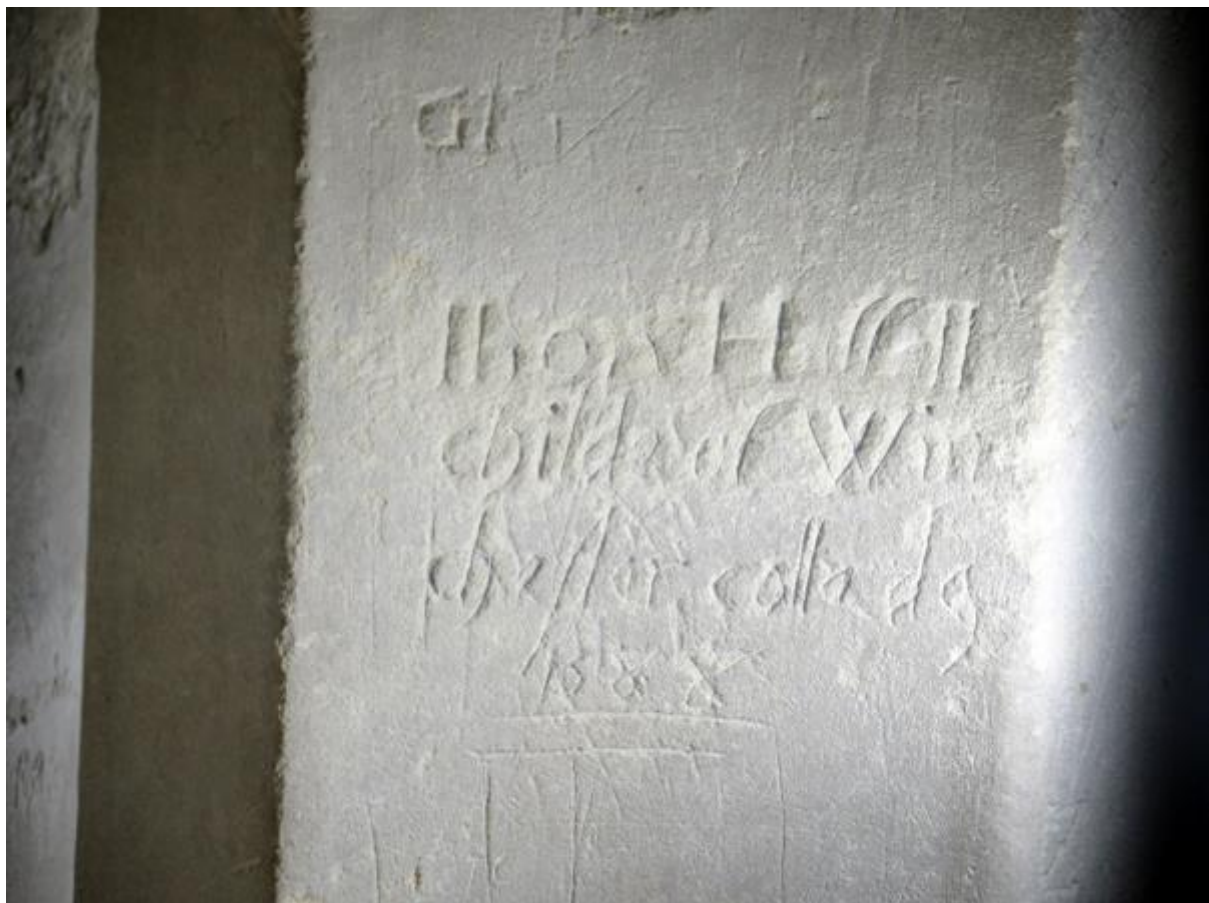
Sarah Hanna

Appendix

This is an image of a mark which I had been unable to transcribe, but it's an example of a memorial to an individual with a clear date, and has led to further research about their identity. We were trying to decipher the name "H . . H . ss? . H?" , which is not clear, but the second and third lines seem to be "childe of Winchester colla dg (college) 1588".

Matt Garner interprets the name as "Ihon Hassall" = John Hassall. An internet search (also from Matt) revealed that an individual of this name was recorded being baptised in 1571 at St Andrew's parish church, Norwich, son of John Hassall, and educated at St Paul's School, London. From 1587 he attended Winchester College, before continuing to New College, Oxford as student and then fellow until 1603. He held positions at Lichfield Cathedral and several parish livings in Burton on Trent and Norfolk, and later became Dean of Norwich. He died in 1654.

[Based on a longer entry found in the **Oxford Dictionary of National Biography** at: <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-65637;jsessionid=35625ED1538BB85E3DB87991890AC9CD>]



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