

Bressingham Church Graffiti Trail

Today graffiti is seen as something unacceptable, and certainly not something we want to encourage in our ancient church. However, that is a very modern attitude. Before the middle of the 19th century people didn't regard graffiti as something that was offensive, and generations of parishioners and visitors have all left their mark on the walls of our church. Today this ancient graffiti, some dating back to the Middle Ages, can tell us a great deal about the history of our church, and the people who worshipped here.

The north side of the tower arch is one of the graffiti 'hot spots' within the church. Here you will see a whole series of deeply carved dates and initials, mostly dating from the 2nd half of the 18th century. With only initials to study it is difficult to tell if these were made by members of the congregation or visitors to the church. If you look closely you will also see pencil graffiti left by visiting bell-ringers.

Many of the early inscriptions in Bressingham church are clearly devotional in nature, and a far cry from modern ideas of graffiti as vandalism. Deeply cut into the pillar you will find a simple cross - perhaps the physical manifestation of a prayer?

Inscribed into the west face of the pillar you will find the word 'Bligt' - quite probably a name. Exactly who they were we can't say, but the inscription can tell us several things. The style of lettering is from the 15th or 16th century, and they were clearly educated, and used to writing. Perhaps a cleric or local priest?

A whole mass of graffiti covers the south side of the tower arch. Amongst these you will see a large number of compass drawn designs. These are known as 'ritual protection marks', or more commonly as 'witch marks' - and were designed to ward off evil spirits.

If you look closely at the centre of the pillar you will also see the medieval mason's original setting out line for the arch - still fresh and sharp after nearly six centuries.

Look for a taper burn mark in the middle of the door. Not an accident, but a medieval ritual protection against fire and lightning. Literally 'fighting fire with fire'!

Churches are dynamic buildings, and although they may look ancient, they change over time. At Bressingham our ancient pews have been changed, moved and altered many times. The backs of the benches that you see today were once part of box-pews made in the 17th century. If you look closely you will see the markings of ancient hinges, and can find two dates that probably tell us exactly when the box-pews were first made.

