

Litcham 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 very earliest marks you will find on any medieval church are those left by the very people who actually built it - the stone masons. Each mason used a unique marking that identified the areas of stone upon which he had worked, allowing the Master Mason to calculate just how much he needed to be paid. Look for the straight line marking that looks like an axe.

The Pelta design seen here is often known as the Solomon's Knot, and is used in the medieval church as a symbol to ward off evil spirits. However, the symbol is far, far older - being one of the most common symbols found amongst Roman designs.

On the north-west face of the pillar is a late medieval inscription made up of the name 'martyn', a cross, and a heart. Although this may be a prayer, and a reference to the 'sacred heart', it could just as well be a rebus or puzzle inscription from 'martyn crossheart'. Look too for the faces carved into the stone...

One of the most spectacular pieces of graffiti in the church is that known as the Litcham Cryptogram. A cryptogram is a puzzle or coded message made up of letters. There are several different interpretations as to what this message actually says, and you will see one of them on the wall by the inscription. Is it the correct one? Who knows? It's a mystery. See what you think it says...

A mass of graffiti inscriptions range across this pillar, from the medieval to the modern. These include several family names such as 'Englond' from the 17th and 18th centuries.

Dating early graffiti can be difficult, unless the inscriptions contain an actual written date. Sometimes the only direct evidence is the fabric into which they were cut. At Litcham we know the pillars were built in 1412, and were first lime-washed in 1547. If you look closely at this pillar you will see inscriptions emerging from beneath that lime-wash - meaning they were made between 1412 and 1547.

