



# Volunteer Handbook



## Aims of the Survey

The NMGS aims to bring together, for the first time, the entire corpus of surviving medieval graffiti from a distinct locality. By choosing to undertake a relatively widescale survey the NMGS will, it is anticipated, discover and record a large number of previously unknown examples. The examples already recorded by the initial survey work indicate that the graffiti within the county is likely to be diverse and contain secular, votive and devotional inscriptions; all of which will shed new light upon the relationship between members of the commonality and the medieval parish church as both an institution and building. It will, it is hoped, re-animate a previously unheard voice within parish studies.

## Why Graffiti

The study of medieval graffiti within parish churches has a long history within the study of archaeology. Some of the earliest articles to appear in dedicated archaeological journals deal specifically with individual site surveys, often undertaken by enthusiastic amateurs, during the latter half of the nineteenth century. However, since this period the subject has largely slipped into obscurity and little work has been undertaken in recent decades. The work that has been undertaken has largely been carried out as and when opportunities have arisen, or when specific examples have been brought to the attention of archaeologists and historians.

The study of medieval graffiti, though having a long pedigree, has largely been overlooked by modern scholars of the church. In part this is most probably the result of the difficulty in identifying the source material. Where written records have long been brought together in record offices and libraries, and stained glass gathered together in archives and reference volumes, medieval graffiti, by its very nature, remains a scattered and largely hidden resource. It's identification, even within a single church, can take many hours of survey work with specialist equipment and, even then, it often remains visible to the naked eye only for as long as it takes to record it under specialist lighting conditions. However, such painstaking surveys can be highly rewarding, opening up previously unseen inscriptions and images that cast new light upon the day to day activities of the commonality within individual church buildings.



# Before You Start

Undertaking a graffiti survey should be an enjoyable task. To begin with it is worth stating that, as you become more experienced in undertaking surveys, you will find that you develop your own styles and techniques. The notes contained in this handbook are designed as a guideline only - and represent the minimum level of information required to undertake a successful survey. Many volunteers provide far more information than is contained on the basic survey sheets. In addition, many people find that it is a far more rewarding experience to undertake surveys in small groups.

## Choosing your site

Although we aim to survey all the surviving medieval churches in the area it is worth choosing your first sites with some care. Churches that still contain thick layers of limewash, or have been heavily 'restored' in recent centuries, are far less likely to contain significant survivals. Churches with arcade piers and bare stone surfaces are much better initial survey sites and will help you gain the experience needed on more challenging sites.

## Preparation

Before carrying out a church graffiti survey we recommend that you undertake some research upon your chosen site. A quick read through the church guidebook, or publications such as Pevsner's Buildings of England, will tell you a great deal that may be useful to you when carrying out a survey. Also check to see if the church has its own dedicated website. This may contain a great deal of useful information about the history of the building, as well as containing information about service times, contact details and opening arrangements.

## Equipment

To undertake a successful survey you will require a minimum level of equipment. This should include, but not be limited to, a digital camera, light source (torch, lamps, etc), photometric scale, copies of the survey sheets and photo record sheets, tape measure, pen/pencil, blue-tack, spare batteries. For larger scale surveys it is also recommended that you have camera tripods and portable high-powered light sources.

## Lighting

To identify existing graffiti it is usually necessary to shine a light source at an oblique angle across the surface of the wall or pier (raking light). This will usually be sufficient to spot even the shallowest of inscriptions. There are no set rules or guidelines about the light source that you use and everyone has their own favourite. In many cases the choice of light source will depend upon the surface you are examining. The very white light emitted by LED torches often works well on bare stone surfaces, whilst larger halogen lamps are found to be useful on rougher textured surfaces. The key is to experiment and discover what works best for both you and your chosen location.



RIGHT: Volunteers using a small LED torch during an initial survey. Small torches and scales fit easily into a coat pocket and can be carried with you during any visit.

## Scales

It is essential that you try and include a scale in any photographs that you take of graffiti inscriptions. Small 10cm scales are supplied free-of-charge by the survey. These can usually be attached to bare stone surfaces by using a small piece of blue-tack or similar. However, if the surface of the stonework is friable, or contains remnants of limewash or paintings, please do NOT use this method - as it may damage the surface. In these cases it is recommended that you simply hold the scale in place whilst the images are taken. We also recognise that, in some cases, particularly when working alone and in challenging conditions, it may not be possible to include a scale in every single photograph. We therefore recommend that a scale is included in at least one of the images of a particular inscription, or a separate note is made of the dimensions on the photo record sheet.

## Photographs

Taking photographs of graffiti inscriptions can be challenging. It is well worth experimenting with a variety of light sources and angles to obtain the best results. If the images have too much light they can often look bleached and difficult to interpret. Too little light, or not enough contrast, can be just as frustrating. We recommend the use of digital cameras so that poor images may be easily deleted without cost. In addition, it is not essential to have an expensive professional level camera to take great photographs. A simple 'point and press' camera will often give as good results as many thousands of pounds worth of camera equipment.

## Documentation

The documentation needed to undertake a graffiti survey is very straightforward and consists of two simple sheets that need to be filled in. Both survey sheets are to be found on the project website. These sheets are designed to be easy to complete and represent the very minimum of information required to undertake a successful survey. Please do not hesitate to include any further information that you feel might be either useful or relevant. Examples of completed survey sheets, with accompanying notes, can be found in this handbook.

## Things to remember

- Some graffiti inscriptions are difficult to interpret. What may appear as a meaningless jumble of lines during a survey may turn out to be something quite important. If in doubt - take a photograph.
- Some churches may contain very complex series of inscriptions that take far more than a single visit to record. Multiple visits are often very productive.
- We do not expect you to know everything. If in any doubt - please ask for help or advice.
- Please remember that churches are active places of worship. Please respect those who look after and care for these buildings.
- Please sign the visitors book. Many churches use visitor numbers to help in supporting future projects and finding funding. Every visitor is important.
- If you have to find a key-holder to access the church please remember to lock up when you leave - and return the key.

## Photographic Examples



**BAD** - not enough contrast and light source at too oblique an angle. As a result details are far harder to make out.



**BAD** - light source held too near the subject has resulted in light reflecting off the stone surface.



**GOOD** - light source at the right angle to create good contrast and far enough away to avoid it reflecting off the surface.

A good photograph should have an almost 3D effect.

# Site Recording Sheet



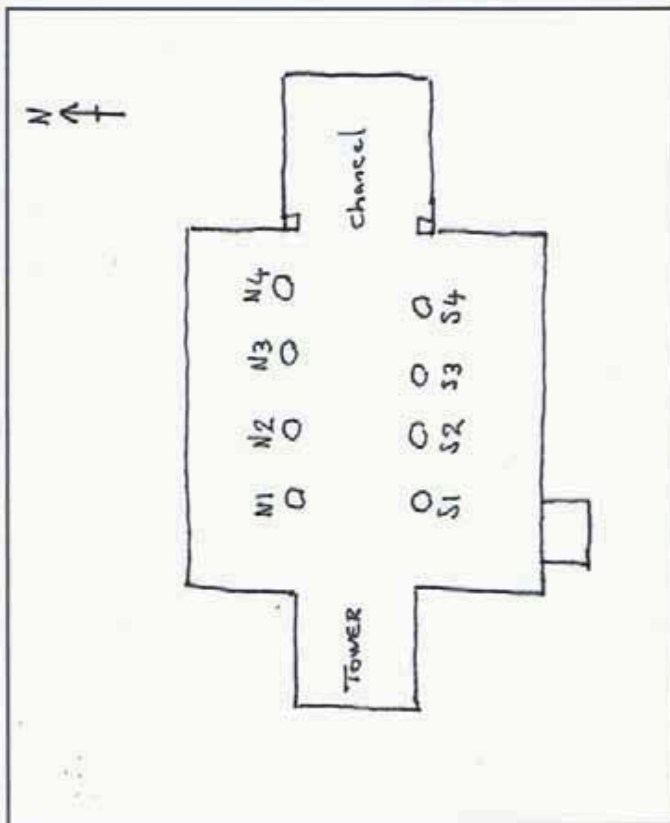
Parish: LITCHAM

Church Dedication: ALL SAINTS

Survey Date: 25.7.11

Surveyor: M. CHAMPION

Completed Survey sheets and accompanying photo record sheets should be returned to the NMGS. Please keep a copy for your records.



Sketch of church interior

Mark piers, if present, from west to east and north to south e.g. N1, N2, N3 and S1, S2, S3 (see volunteer handbook)

## Wall Fabric Surface (notes)

Aisle walls heavily limewashed.  
Chancel walls painted.  
Piers - evidence of former limewash & pigment. Soft chalk-like stone.

## General Comments

Graffiti concentrated on piers. Ringing chamber of tower covered in 18th & 19th graffiti from bell ringers

Weather Conditions: CLOUDY &

OVER CAST

Light Source(s): Hand held LED

torch. 2 x 250 w halogen lamps

## Notes on Graffiti

Quantity of graffiti: Large quantities present on piers. Particular concentrations on piers S4 & N4. Modern graffiti over lies early examples. Some graffiti still emerging from beneath limewash.

Quality of graffiti: Lots of text & images. Softness of the piers means that many inscriptions abraded. High quality text + images.

Masons Marks	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Ship graffiti	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Ritual Circles	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Swastika Pelta	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Textual inscriptions	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Architectural	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Heraldic	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	Animals/Fish/Birds	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Merchants Marks	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes?	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Hands/Feet/Limbs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Crosses	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Faces/Heads	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

# Completed Survey Sheet - Notes

Please fill out all the basic information, including church dedication, and the date the survey was undertaken. For return visits to the same church please fill out a new survey sheet

A simple sketch plan of the church will be an invaluable aid to marking the location of graffiti inscriptions on the photo record sheet.

Is the surface still lime-washed? Is the stone surface rough or smooth? Does it look as though the surface has been cleaned or restored?

**Site Recording Sheet**

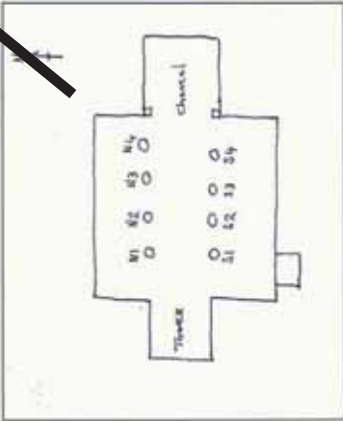
Parish: LITCHAM

Church Dedication: ALL SAINTS

Survey Date: 25.7.11

Surveyor: M. CHAMPION

Completed Survey sheets and accompanying photo record sheets should be returned to the NACS. Please keep a copy for your records.



Sketch of church interior

Mark piers, if present, from west to east and north to south e.g. N1, N2, N3 and S1, S2, S3 (see volunteer handbook)

Notes on Graffiti

Quantity of graffiti: Large quantities present on piers. Particular concentrations on piers S4 & N4. Modern graffiti over lies early examples. Some graffiti still emerging from beneath lime-wash.

Quality of graffiti: Lots of text & images. Softness of the piers means that many inscriptions abraded. High quality text & images.

Wall Fabric Surface (notes)

Aisle walls heavily lime-washed. Chancel walls painted. Piers - evidence of former lime-wash & pigment. Soft chalk-like stone.

General Comments

Graffiti concentrated on piers. Ringing chamber of tower covered in 19th & 20th graffiti from bell rings

Weather Conditions: CLOUDY & OVERCAST

Light Source(s): Hand held LED torch, 2 x 250w halogen lamps

Masons Marks	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Ship graffiti	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Ritual Circles	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Swastika/Pelta	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Textual inscriptions	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Architectural	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Heraldic	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	Animals/Fish/Birds	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Merchants Marks	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes?	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Hands/Feet/Limbs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Crosses	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Faces/Heads	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

This is largely a matter of experience. However, a church with only 3 or 4 inscriptions would be considered a low concentration. A church containing 50+ inscriptions would be regarded as 'busy'

Weather conditions are very important in judging the thoroughness of a survey. A bright sunny day will make it difficult to see some inscriptions - and a return visit might be needed.

Quality of the inscriptions varies greatly - and judgements are based upon experience. Simple circles or crosses would be regarded as lower quality than full text inscriptions or detailed architectural inscriptions.

What type of torch/lamp was used? LED or traditional?

Please mark all the categories that apply. These later become search fields on the database. If in any doubt please make a separate note on the reverse of the survey sheet.

# Photographic Record Sheets

It is important that we have full records of the location of all images that you submit to the survey. This will enable any inscription to be easily located again. However, there are two accepted methods of recording the images.

1. In churches where little graffiti is present record every photograph that is taken on the photo record sheet and submit them all to the survey.
2. In churches where a large quantity of graffiti is found, or where photographic conditions are less than ideal, it will probably be necessary to take multiple images of each inscription. In this case only submit the images that show the inscriptions in the most detail and with the most clarity. Accompany these images with a photo record sheet of the submitted images **ONLY**.

Note - in churches that contain a large quantity of inscriptions it will often be necessary to complete multiple photographic record sheets.

Sheet 1 of 3  
←

## Photo Record Sheet

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Site Name: All Saints, Litcham

Date: 6/7/11

Surveyor: M. CHAMPION

Number	Location	Description
1	S1 \ SE face	Date + initials
2	S1 \ SE face	General + date
3	S1 \ NE face	Partially covered DW. Man + Dog
4	S1 \ NE face	Man + dog detail
5	S1 \ NE face	DW detail.
6	S1 \ N face	circle
7	S1 \ N face	General + circle
8	S2 \ S face	DW general
9	S2 \ S face	" detail
10	S2 \ S face	" detail.
11	S2 \ S face	————— DVD
12	S2 \ SW face	General
13	S2 \ SW face	General upper section
14	S2 \ SW face	Cryptogram
15	" "	Cryptogram detail
16	" "	Ditto
17	" "	Ditto
18	" "	Circles below
19	" "	Circles below detail
20	S2 \ W face	circle defaced
21	S2 \ W face	circle detail
22	S2 \ NW face	? MM ?
23	" "	MM? detail
24	S2 \ NE face	Multiple DW
25	" "	Detail of DW
26	" "	" " "
27	S2 \ E face	Marks + DW
28	S2 \ E face	Detail
29	" "	" closer
30	S3 \ S face	text multiple general
31	" "	text detail (Maria?)
32	" "	text detail (England?)
33	S3 \ SE face	text general
34	" "	text multiple
35	" "	text detail (??)

Cont.  
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# Undertaking a Survey

## Where to go?

Graffiti appears to be fairly common in churches across the country, with no particular geographical concentrations. Certainly churches located on or near the coast do appear to be slightly more likely to contain certain types of graffiti than those located inland, but even this tendency is difficult to pin down with any certainty. Indeed, the chances are that wherever you are located you will be no more than a few miles from a church that contains significant examples of medieval graffiti.

However, for anyone who actually wants to go out and search for examples of medieval graffiti there are a few things to bear in mind. Firstly, the state of repair and decoration of the inside of the church is the key factor in being able to identify inscriptions. Churches that are still covered in layers of lime-wash are unlikely to have inscriptions still visible. Similarly, churches that have undergone extensive restoration in recent centuries, particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century, are less likely to contain medieval graffiti. In many cases the Victorian restorations of church interiors went as far as stripping back the layers of lime-wash, removing wall paintings and, in extreme cases, the removal of the internal plaster surface to expose the bare stonework beneath. This fashion for 'restoration' sometimes also included the re-cutting of many of the stone surfaces within the church, removing every inscription that may have been present. It is therefore more likely that you will discover the most medieval inscriptions in churches that have had the least restoration.

## Where to look?

Although graffiti inscriptions can be found on just about any surface within a church or cathedral research has shown that there are certain areas, or 'hot spots', where inscriptions are more likely to be concentrated than others. In the first instance it is always advisable to look for places within the church where more recent or modern graffiti may be visible. Recent police studies, aimed at reducing the instances of graffiti in urban environments, has clearly demonstrated that graffiti is far more likely to occur in areas where graffiti has already taken place. Graffiti, as it were, attracts graffiti. Therefore, if you can identify areas where more recent graffiti inscriptions have been created it is highly likely that they are placed close to, or on top of, earlier inscriptions.

The instances of graffiti, and their distribution patterns, may well alter from church to church. However, there are certain areas that tend to attract graffiti. In a church with aisles then the arcade piers, particularly if their surfaces are faceted rather than round, are usually a good place to begin a search for inscriptions. Other locations that commonly show graffiti are around doorways, particularly the south door and, if present, the tower stair, the tower arch, chancel arch and font. However, any relatively flat and plain area of stonework may well have attracted graffiti over the centuries and no area should be entirely ruled out. The inscriptions are often located at eye level, where they can be quite obvious, or lower down on the stonework, suggesting that they may have been created by someone kneeling down.

Graffiti inscriptions can also vary widely in terms of size. Whilst inscribed names and decorative patterns tend to be quite small and discrete others may well represent life sized depictions of faces, hands and feet. In the case of the architectural graffiti inscriptions discovered at Binham Priory in Norfolk the largest of the four designs identified on the arcade piers was over eight feet (2.4 metres) high. It is therefore important not to dismiss engraved lines or curves that appear random and have no immediate obvious meaning. It may well be that they belong to an inscription that it is impossible to correctly identify due to either its scale or state of preservation.

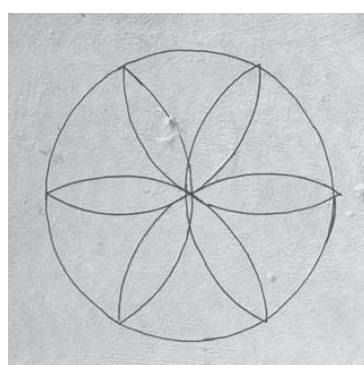
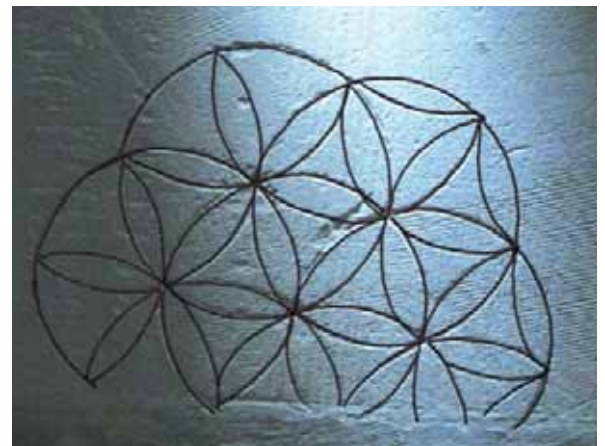
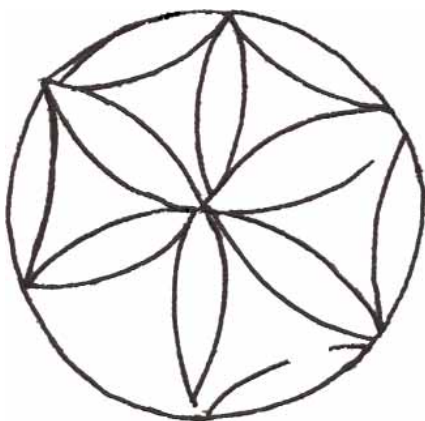
What all of this really indicates are that there are no hard and fast rules as to where you can discover medieval graffiti. Some churches are, perhaps, more likely than others to contain examples, and some locations within churches are more likely than others to have attracted inscriptions. However, wherever you search, in churches large and small, the chances are that somewhere nearby a medieval parishioner will have left their mark upon the building. It is simply a case of looking for it.

What might I find?

The simple answer is just about anything - and many examples are included in this handbook. However, any study of church graffiti will always throw up a number of symbols that, no matter where you are in the country, keep turning up. Certain types of graffiti, such as Ship graffiti or heraldic devices, turn up across the country. However, although dealing with the same subject matter, these images most often contain considerable variation. A ship in Norfolk will, in all likelihood, bear a passing resemblance to a ship in Cornwall, but it will not be identical. Likewise, heraldic devices found in one church will probably show significant differences from heraldic devices found elsewhere. At best they can be said to share the same subject matter.

However, there are a number of identical designs and symbols that, no matter where in the country you look, will be discovered. These symbols, of which there are three main varieties, will, in many cases, be exact matches. There may be slight variations upon the same theme, or more elaborate examples, but in all other respects they will be identical. You are as likely to find exactly the same symbol in a church in Yorkshire as you are a church in Kent. Examples of these repetitive symbols are shown below.

## Common Discoveries



### Compass Drawn Designs

Probably the most common discovery made in any church, these compass drawn designs can take a multitude of forms - from a simple circle or cross design - to a complex six petalled rosette. Their exact meaning remains enigmatic.

### Swastika Pelta or Solomon's Knot

This design has been discovered in numerous churches all over Europe. Although it is an ancient symbol, appearing upon Roman mosaics from as early as the 4th century, it appears to have been adopted as a christian symbol. However, its exact meaning remains obscure.



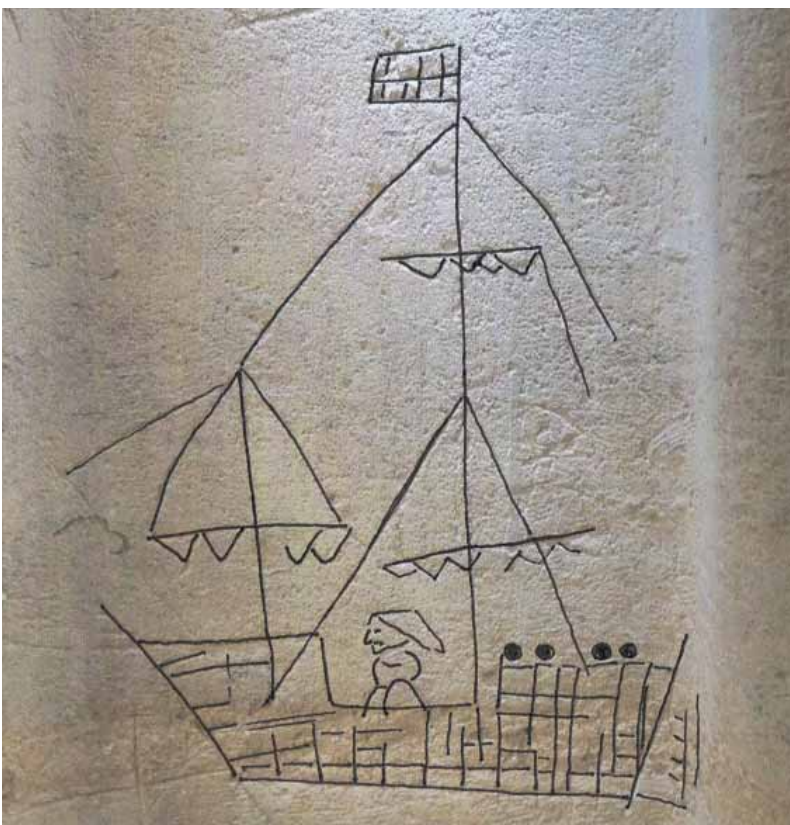
This symbol turns up inscribed in both stone and wood - and is often found inversed. It has been associated with the Virgin Mary - but it's symbolism still remains unclear. Often found incised into doorways.

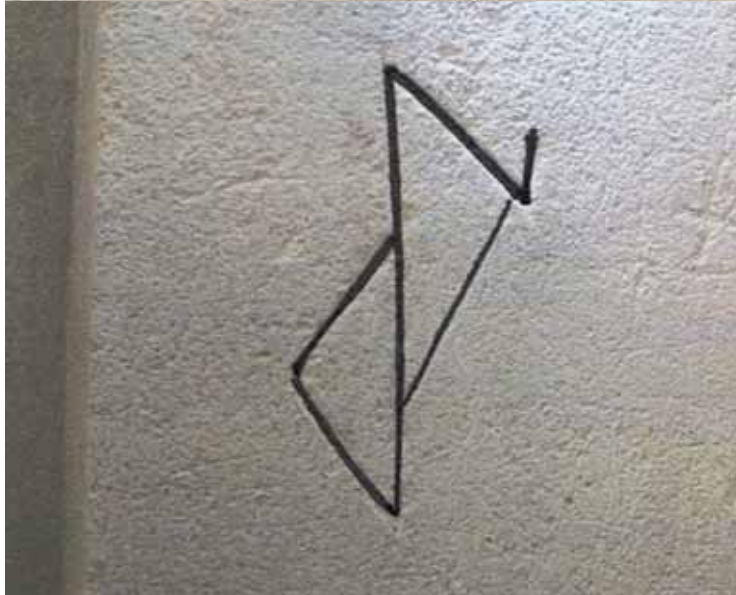


### Ship Graffiti

Examples of ship graffiti are fast becoming one of the most commonly discovered types of church graffiti. Although they are found in large numbers around the coast they have also been found as far inland as Leicestershire. Many are just very simple stylised ships - whilst others, like this example from Wiveton in Norfolk, can be very complex indeed.

From their location within churches many of these examples appear to be devotional in nature. However, whether they are thanks for a safe voyage undertaken, or a plea for safe passage in the future, remains obscure.

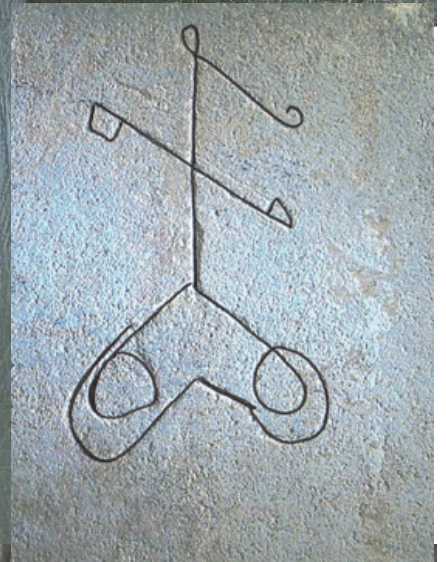
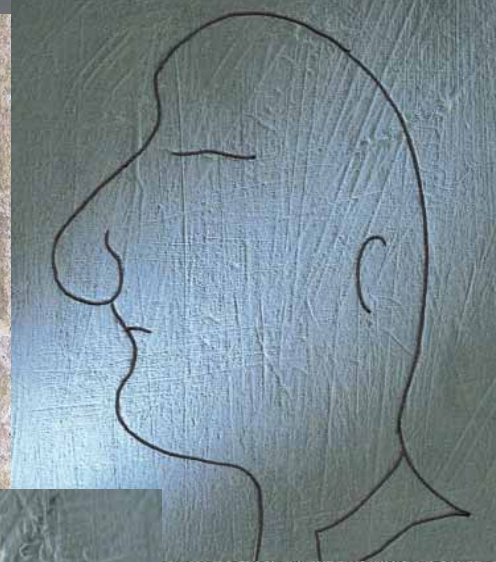
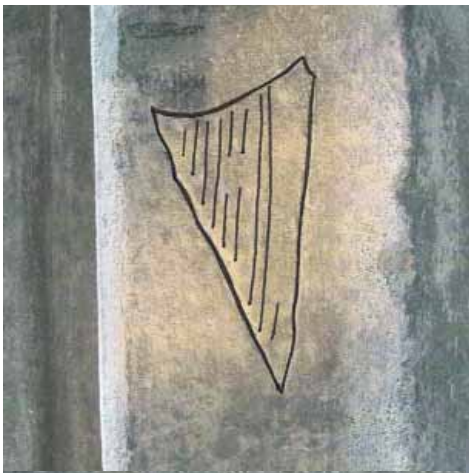




### **Mason's Marks**

**Masons marks were inscribed on the stones of the church during construction by the stone-masons themselves. It is believed that they were used to indicate which mason had actually carried out which piece of work - and allowed them to be paid accordingly. One church may contain many different marks.**

**Although not technically graffiti we also record all the examples that we come across.**



# Volunteer Agreement

This Volunteer Agreement describes the arrangement between the Norfolk Medieval Graffiti Survey (NMGS) and you. We wish to assure you of our appreciation of your volunteering with us and will do the best we can to make your volunteer experience with us enjoyable and rewarding.

## PART 1: THE ORGANISATION

Your role as a volunteer is to undertake the surveying and recording of examples of pre and post reformation graffiti in Norfolk churches, or elsewhere as agreed with the Project Director, and to pass those results back to the organisation for recording, archiving and storage. This volunteering role is designed to create a collection of material that will add to our understanding of the medieval church as both a structure and institution.

You can expect the Norfolk Medieval Graffiti Survey:

### 1. INDUCTION AND TRAINING

- To provide a thorough induction on the work of the Norfolk Medieval Graffiti Survey, its staff, your volunteering role and the induction and/or training you need to meet the responsibilities of this role. The Volunteer Handbook provides full details of the organisation.

### 2. SUPERVISION, SUPPORT AND FLEXIBILITY

- To explain the standards we expect for our services and to encourage and support you to achieve and maintain them;
- To provide a named person who will meet with you upon request to discuss your volunteering and any successes and problems;
- To do our best to help you develop your volunteering role with us.

### 3. MATERIAL

The Norfolk Medieval Graffiti Survey is a voluntary community archaeology project and we are therefore unable to meet any expenses that you may incur. However, the Norfolk Medieval Graffiti Survey will provide you with the specialist paperwork, forms and photometric scales to enable you to undertake your role as a volunteer.

### 4. HEALTH AND SAFETY

- To provide adequate training and feedback in support of our health and safety policy, a copy of which is in the Volunteer Handbook.

### 5. COPYRIGHT AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

- All information and images gathered by you during your role as a volunteer for the Norfolk Medieval Graffiti Survey remains your copyright. However, by submitting the information and images to the Norfolk Medieval Graffiti Survey you agree that the Norfolk Medieval Graffiti Survey may use, publish and reproduce this information and images for the benefit of academic research and the furtherance of the projects objectives. In addition, all images and information submitted will be recorded on the regional Historic Environment Record.

## **6. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

- To ensure that all volunteers are dealt with in accordance with our equal opportunities policy, a copy of which is set out in the Volunteer Handbook.

## **7. PROBLEMS**

- To try to resolve fairly any problems, complaints and difficulties you may have while you volunteer with us;
- In the event of an unresolved problem, to offer an opportunity to discuss the issues in accordance with the procedures set out in the Volunteer Handbook.

## **PART 2: THE VOLUNTEER**

**We expect you:**

- To help the Norfolk Medieval Graffiti Survey fulfil its objective of undertaking the first large scale and systematic survey of pre- and post reformation graffiti inscriptions;
- To perform your volunteering role to the best of your ability;
- To follow the organisation's procedures and standards, including health and safety and equal opportunities, in relation to its staff, volunteers and clients;
- Respect the places of worship that you visit, and those individuals and organisations that care for them;
- To meet the time commitments and standards which have been mutually agreed to and to give reasonable notice so other arrangements can be made when this is not possible;
- To forward the results of your surveys to the Project Director in a timely manner.

**This agreement is binding in honour only, is not intended to be a legally binding contract between us and may be cancelled at any time at the discretion of either party. Neither of us intend any employment relationship to be created either now or at any time in the future.**

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**SIGNED**

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**DATE**



Troston, Suffolk

