

St Edwards Teffont Magna



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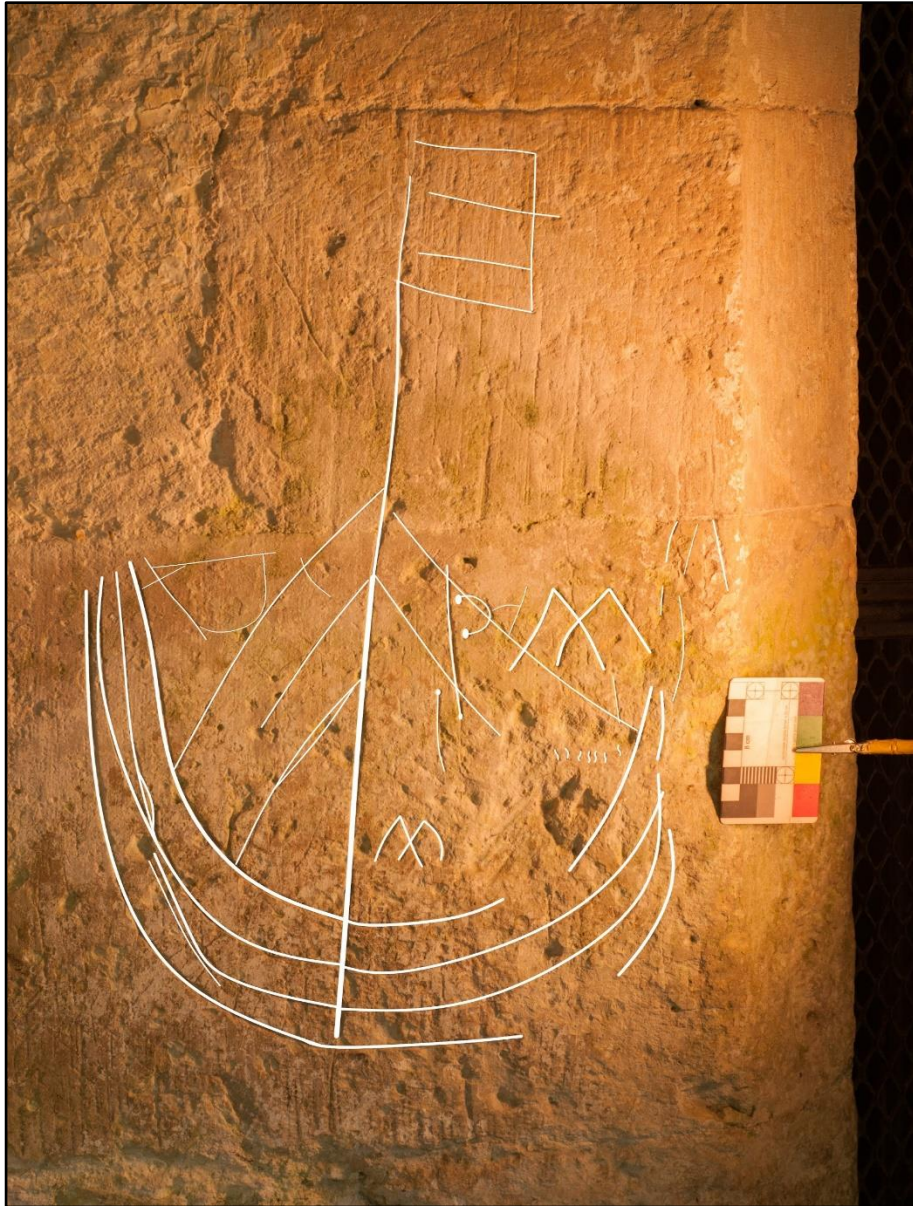
At the picturesque village of Teffont Magna seated in the Nadder Valley lies the church of St Edward, an unpretentious building, well presented and home to a varied and fine selection of historical graffiti.

The Wiltshire Medieval Graffiti Survey was set up in 2014 to formally record historical inscriptions, apotropaic marks (protective markings said to avert malevolent forces) and re-use of stone where applicable. We have been fortunate to gain access to Malmesbury Abbey, Bath Abbey all of the CCT churches within the county as well as a host of others. We also record barns and farm buildings including Bradford on Avon monastic barn and its sister barn, Messums at Tisbury.

One of our core objectives is to enhance knowledge of a building, provide an insight into superstitious belief and to raise awareness of the need to conserve these inscriptions for the future.

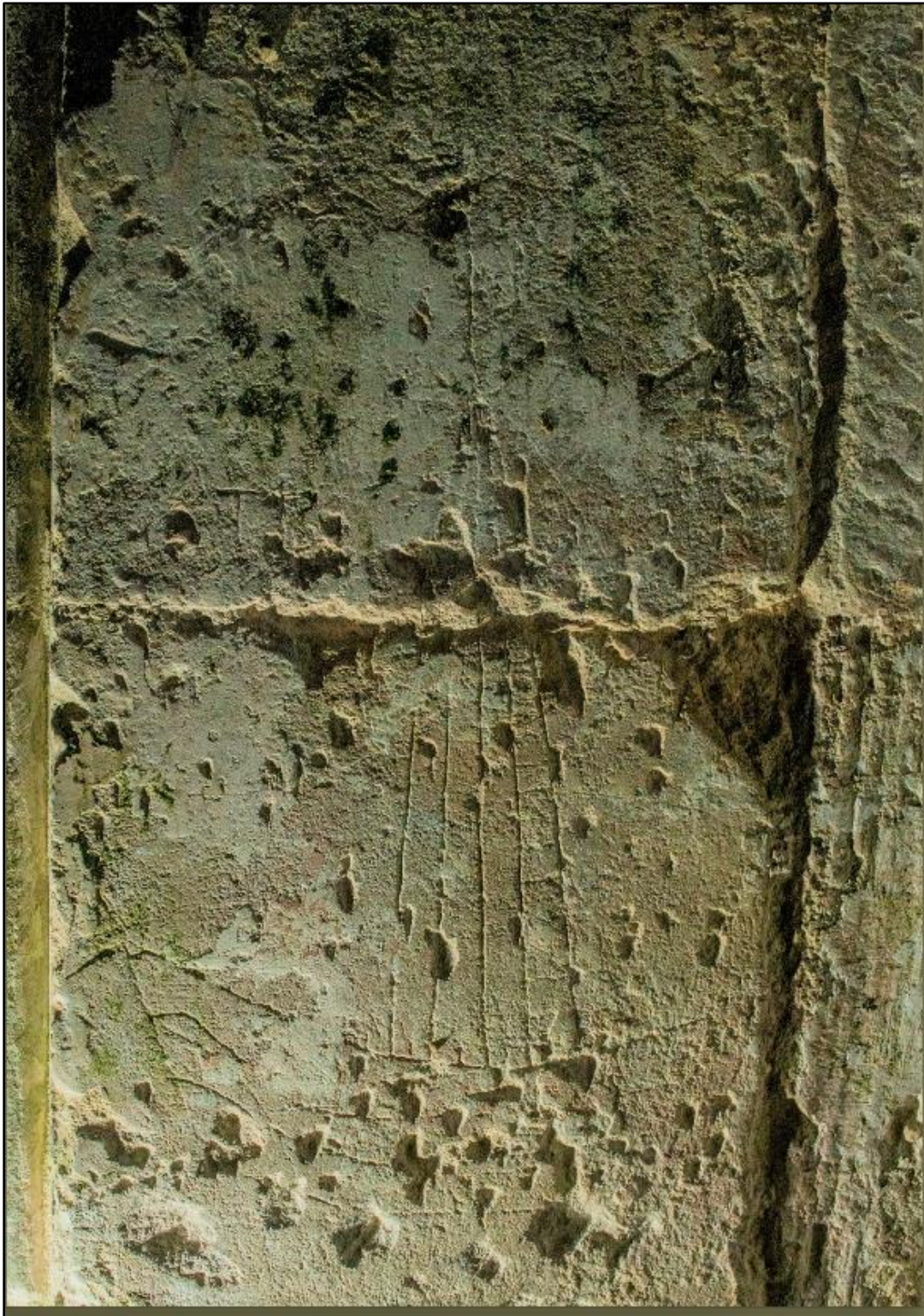
Further information can be found at www.wiltshire-medieval-graffiti-survey.com



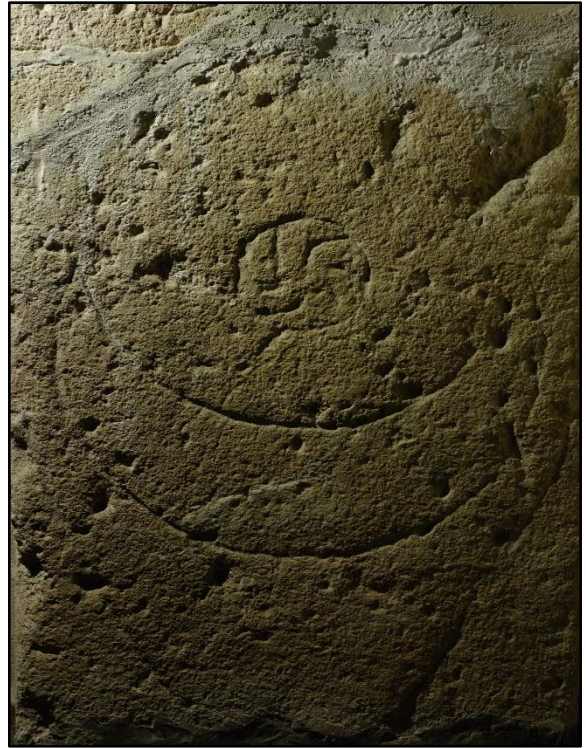
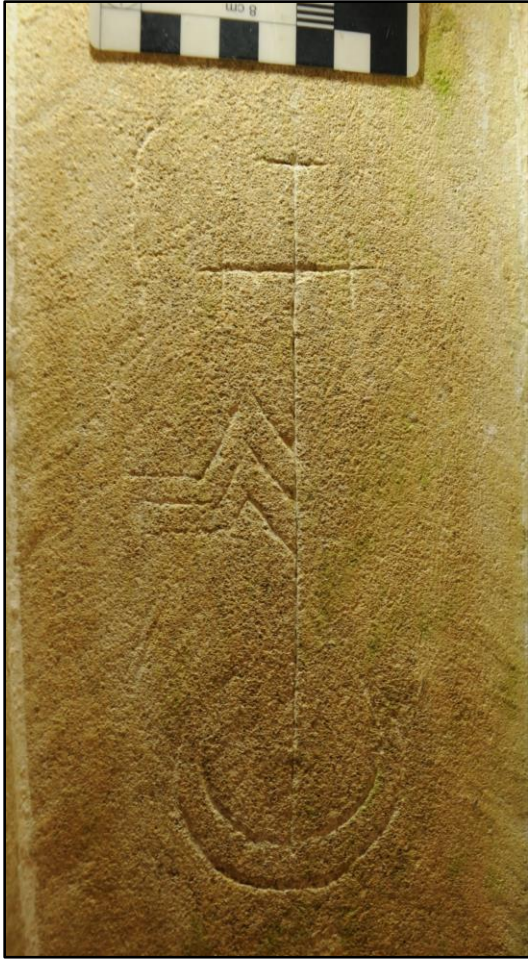


Situated immediately to the left of the main doorway, inside the south porch, this ship representation is crudely executed but does contain some identifiable detail. The partially annotated image above reveals a little more as the stone has suffered some erosion over time and brings into view the flag atop the mast as well as rudimentary rigging. As is common with other ship representations the depiction is of a side profile. Reasons for their inclusion on coastal sites and in land-locked counties such as Wiltshire may include blessings for a safe sea voyage or have allegorical meanings tied in with the church. Champion (2015) writes at length on the

national and regional associations between a ship and the church, and the precise meaning within Teffont Magna may remain elusive.



Comparative ship:Keevil



The Crescent is often associated with Mary and multiple versions can be found at Lacock as a probable mason's mark (above left). The singular motif (above right) is on a tomb lid at All Saints' church, Maiden Bradley.



Within the porch to the right of the interior door is one of the most interesting and enigmatic symbols found within Wiltshire. Often mistaken for a ship, but when the perspective is altered it is more than reminiscent of the Stourton Drag (Slater, S. per. corr.). This was a sled purportedly used by one Botolph Stourton, a giant of a man, and was used to bring his dead from the battlefield. Stourton stood at 9 feet 6 inches and what was believed to be his femur measured some twenty-two inches (55.8 cms) survived until

the 19th C when it was reportedly destroyed in a fire (Stourton 1899: 6).

The accompanying sketch comes from A.C. Fox Davies' "Heraldic Badges" and refers to the sled being adopted by the family as a badge. According to Fox Davies there is (or was) a sled on the wall at St Nicholas', Little Langford and references by Colt-Hoare of their inclusion in window glass at St Peter's, Stourton (Fox Davies (1907: 146).

Below the "drag" graffito the stone has delaminated, and the eroded nature of the stone allows us to see the remnants of an incised cross that when cut would have penetrated deeply into the stonework.

These are common within churches throughout the country, particularly within the porch area or surrounding an entrance. Opinion is divided on their function, however the historical nature of the function of the porch as a place of marriage, the swearing of oaths and the sealing of legalities amongst the "ordinary" folk may help us to appreciate that the significance of an incised cross to mark an oath as sealing a deal in heaven as on earth (Champion 2015).



Of further interest and remaining within the porch and moving clockwise around onto the east wall where the porch trusses meet the wall are fine examples of small “compass-drawn” circles. I say compass-drawn however their size and the medium they are incised in may suggest they were cut by a rase-knife, a carpenter’s tool for marking out timber.



It is difficult to attribute these marks to an apotropaic function (Gk to avert) although a carpenter may have left them visible deliberately in order to offer some protection to his work.



While incised figures are relatively common within undisturbed contexts it is always a pleasure to reveal a new one! This roughly executed figure does contain some detail that is not at first apparent. The collar appears to indicate a “ruff” which was in vogue in the UK mid-16th to mid-17th Century amongst higher status individuals. The figure’s lack of visibility is apparent as it is located on the interior r/h jamb of the external porch arch, out of sight and unlikely to catch

any natural sunlight to reveal its presence. We've used an artificial, raking light in order to capture this image.

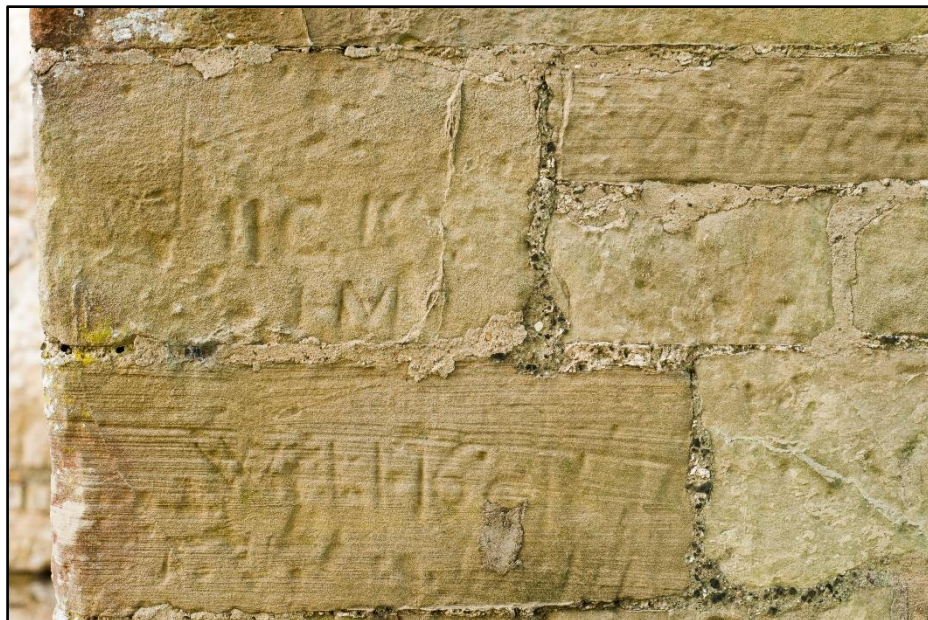
Below the figure is an ominous motif in the form of what we believe to be the remains of a hangman. It is eroded and overlain with an initial "W". These are rare in Wiltshire although we have found one in Bath Abbey that acts as an informal memorial. It is not known whether it is representative of a game or a more sinister memorial.



The most common sets of graffiti found are initials and St Edward's is no exception. If they have a date they can be more interesting and if they have some Christian meaning behind them such as "W" or "M" or combinations thereof then they may be attributable to the Virgin Mary and may take on a more protective guise rather than just making your mark.



Remaining inside the porch the above partially eroded initials at least give us a date of 1677. Compare these to the exterior porch initials below. We can make out 1760 in the lower stone and possibly repeated in the top right however the erosion has removed much of the detail.



In terms of Marian Marks the prominent and common “W” or “M” marks are easily confused with initials. Where we’ve seen them singularly like with the ship graffito at the beginning then they may be regarded as a votive or protective mark. In the case of the “W” and “M” used together it has been suggested by Easton that both symbols evoke Mary and that together may be viewed as of greater power (Easton 2016, 43). We have found similar examples in the same location (inner door jamb) at Melcome Horsey, Dorset and at Great Chalfield Manor, Wiltshire.



The west end of the church which backs onto water has a number of apotropaic symbols on the stonework. Pre-dating the service hut, these are highly eroded and are deceptively sail like.



Below these are the remains of what may be votive crosses. The incised holes at the extremities in the first image define the cross more sharply than the second. The level of erosion is high and they're almost lost.

Moving around to the northern exterior aspect there is a simple informal memorial. Initials, perhaps a date enclosed within a box or a “house” like shape generally denotes a memorial (In this instance the crossed “l” represents a “J”).



The East end of the church contains a plethora of initials and dates. The density is most likely due to its closeness to the road more than any other reason.





Finally, the interior contains a fine “tally mark” in the south window. We find these in barns in addition to places of worship, not all of the same number and never enough to constitute the counting of crops or churchgoers. The more we record the more we hope to offer a definitive answer beyond perhaps an apotropaic function.



Acknowledgements

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References

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