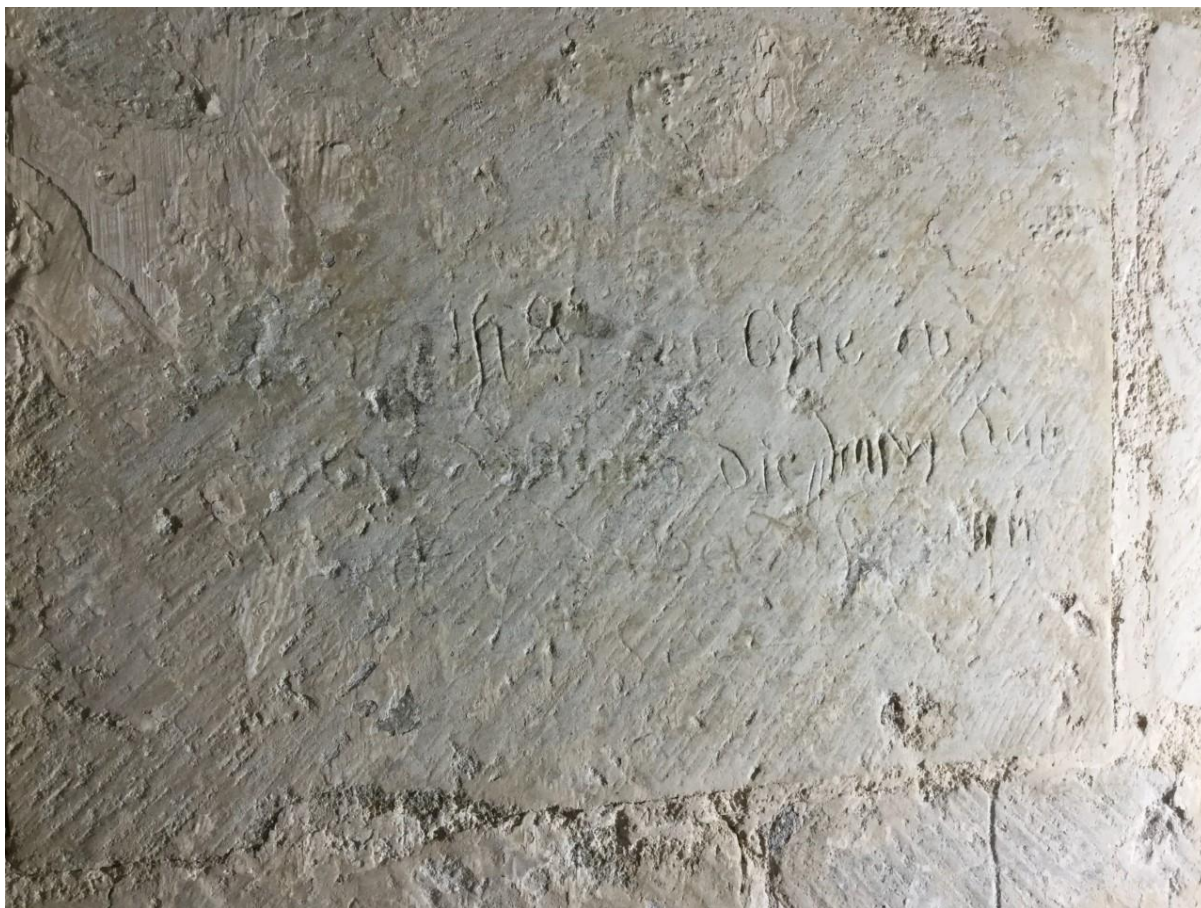


Hampshire Medieval Graffiti Project report on Ashley inscription

The following information has been shared with Tina Osgood, Local Community Officer of the CCT West Region by Karen Wardley, Co-ordinator of the Hampshire Medieval Graffiti Project, prior to commissioning an RTI survey in partnership with the Friends of St Mary's, which has now been successfully carried out.



The inscription is on the chancel arch at Ashley church (image above). We think it is potentially very exciting and of national significance.

We have taken many images of it, lit from different angles, to attempt to read it.

One of our group, Dr Karen Parker, who has extensive experience in transcribing 16th century inventories and wills, most recently for the VCH, has been working on this, and has also consulted with Tom Olding, who is a former history lecturer at Winchester University, a respected palaeographer, and who runs courses in medieval Latin. Karen has now come to some very interesting conclusions.

She has identified that the inscription ends with a date, the last day of June, (ultimi diei Junii) in the 4th regnal year of Edward VI, (Edwardi Sexti iiii) and concludes with the year 1550, written in Arabic numerals.

She wondered what might have occasioned such an inscription in that year. It is in Latin, so must have been made by someone who was literate and well educated. She discovered that an Act had been passed that year, connected with the Protestant reforms which were being carried out, when the authorities were trying to stamp out the old Catholic practices which many churches were reluctant to abandon. This Act was passed in 1550 for **“the defacing of images and the bringing in of books of old service in the church”**, and also, significantly, ordered the destruction, *by the end of June*, of **“all images of stone, timber, alabaster or earth, graven, carved or painted which heretofore have been broken out of any church or chapel or yet stand in any church or chapel.”** The responsibility for this destruction lay with local officials such as church wardens. Local commissioners were appointed to check that the churches had complied, and there were hefty fines for failure to do so – 20 shillings for a first offence, £4 for a second, and imprisonment for a third.

There was in consequence a widespread covering of wall paintings with whitewash in English parish churches at this time, and we found that the parish records from Bramley church, near Basingstoke, include expenses incurred for the replacement of the altar with a simple table, and the "whytynge" of the church, that is the whitewashing over of the wall paintings.

We therefore believe this inscription was made by the priest or a local commissioner to formally record that the requirements of 1550 Act had been carried out, just in the nick of time, and that Ashley church was free from all graven images and idolatrous wall paintings. We know there were wall paintings here as we have the surviving fragment by the chancel window.

There is still more of the inscription to transcribe, and we would suggest that more professional photographic techniques, or methods such as RTI might prove effective in revealing the remaining lettering which is very faint and hard to decipher.