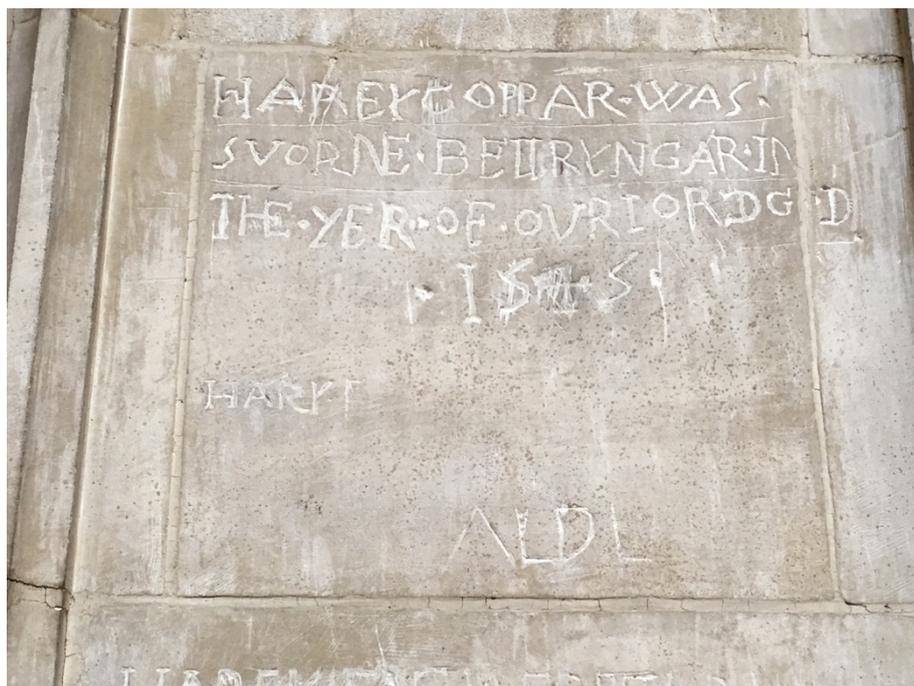


## EDITORS' NOTES

### Harry Coppar – Bellringer



Winchester Cathedral has a large amount of graffiti carved into the stone of all areas of the building, both in accessible and, now, inaccessible areas. The study of graffiti as historical evidence is a new area of enquiry and, in conjunction with the University of Winchester's Research Apprenticeship Programme (WRAP), I am undertaking a photographic survey of the graffiti in the cathedral to see what already exists and then collating it according to style, type and location for future study. The data collected will eventually be available for others to study as well. The database being compiled considers the location, style, and date (where possible) of the graffiti to consider how it can add to the 'story' of the building and how people in the past related to it. This research will also attempt to place the graffiti into the sequence of both the building itself and events across its long history.

Harry Coppar's graffiti is the earliest dated example that has been found so far, 1545. This date is significant as it was carved only six years after the monastic Priory of St Swithun had been dissolved during the Dissolution of the Monasteries, undertaken by Henry VIII and his chief minister, Thomas Cromwell. The cathedral was then refounded as a secular cathedral with a dean and canons in 1541, with the last Prior William Basyng, being the first Dean and some of the monks becoming the

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canons.<sup>1</sup> The dissolution of the Benedictine Priory of St Swithun after 500 years meant that the building created for a community of monks and their daily round of services underwent a profound change, in personnel, liturgy and access.

This change, from a monastic house to a secular cathedral meant that services were only undertaken during the day, none at night thus ending of the 'enclosed' nature of Benedictine monasticism. It is likely that that the monks of Winchester in the sixteenth century were not as 'enclosed' as their earlier predecessors, but this feature was likely to be an abrupt change. The nature of these changes in the daily life of the building is not researched in any detail and few documents survive to describe how these ex-monks adapted to a new lifestyle.

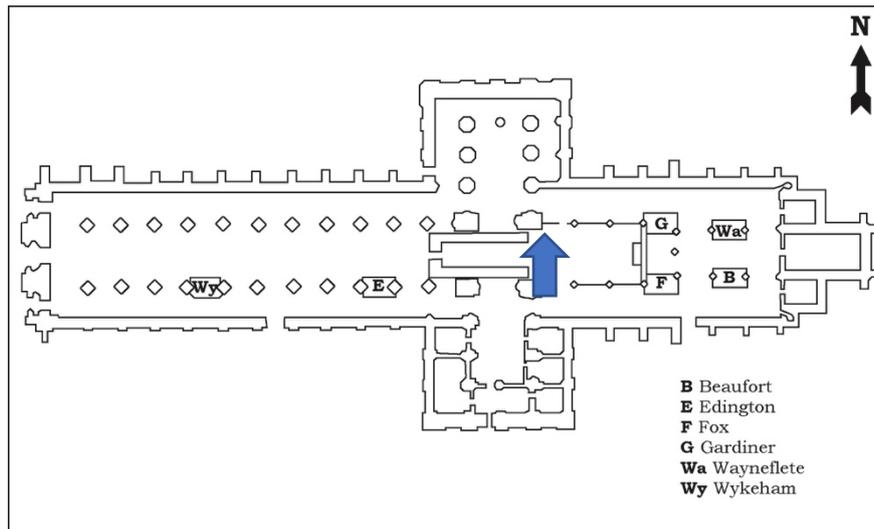
Therefore, the date of Harry Coppar's celebration of his achievement of becoming a sworn bellringer in his graffiti, in the cathedral needs to take this change into account. Created in 1545 it can be suggested that this graffiti represents an ability and opportunity to create this large and prominent message without sanction. As no graffiti can be linked to the monastic period this example is therefore significant in this regard. The location is also significant, located on the north side of the presbytery, on a blind arcade facing the bishop's cathedra. These arcades were not old in 1545, having been created as part of Bishop Fox's remodelling of this area of the church along with the placement of the chests on these arcades containing the remains of the Anglo-Saxon kings, bishops, and queen from the Old Minster in the episcopate of Richard Fox (1501-28).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J Greatrex, 'St Swithun's Priory in the Later Middle Ages', *Winchester Cathedral: Nine Hundred Years*, ed. J Crook (Chichester, Phillimore & Co, 1993), p.159.

<sup>2</sup> P Draper & R K Morris, 'The Development of the East End of Winchester Cathedral from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> Century', *Winchester Cathedral: Nine Hundred Years*, ed. J Crook (Chichester, Phillimore & Co, 1993), p.178

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While representing this change in the nature of the cathedral, this graffiti can also help with an understanding of the building sequence. Currently there is nothing in this area to link bellringers and the area between the presbytery and choir. The bells are currently rung in their own chamber in the tower. But in 1545 this chamber was not in existence, and the bells were rung in the location of the graffiti, until the current bell chamber was built in 1624.<sup>3</sup> Further evidence for the original location of the bell ropes can be seen in the roof space above the choir where the ropes have carved a large groove in the stone, in direct line with the graffiti location. Thus, Harry was able to carve his message to prosperity in the very location where he undertook his work.

As this project progresses this type of analysis can be used to illuminate these building sequences and how they affected the people who worked and visited the cathedral. At the moment preliminary work has shown a real gender differential in the graffiti, with few female voices. The dates of the graffiti also indicate a long period of relative neglect of this building which allowed visitors (or cathedral staff) to carve large and elaborate graffiti with no apparent censure. This period, from the Dissolution of the Monasteries to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is a period recognised as difficult for the greater churches of England, along with the problems of the seventeenth century Civil

<sup>3</sup> C. Cook, 'Bellringing in Winchester: A study of the ringing of bells since the Reformation at Winchester Cathedral', BA Dissertation (Unpubl.), 2001. I am grateful for Colin for this information and his help in deciphering the location of Harry's graffiti.

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War (another area of research).<sup>4</sup> This future research is exciting and will also allow us to understand the importance of the building to those who were unable to have commemoration in the normal way, by tombs, burial etc, the graffiti can be seen as their attempts at memorialisation. The cathedral, across the period from the Dissolution to the present day, can be seen as significant to the people who left their personal marks here and illuminates a group of people otherwise unrecorded.

CINDY WOOD

### Photo Attribution

Harry Coppar graffiti: Photograph by author, 2021.

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<sup>4</sup> G. Cobb, *English Cathedrals the Forgotten Centuries: Restoration and Change from 1530 to the Present Day*, (Over Wallop, Thames & Hudson, 1980), pp.6-8.