

New Graffiti uncovered in Colchester Castle.

CAG members were originally involved in a survey running from 2002 to 2005 to record the graffiti found on the walls of Colchester Castle. Reports appeared in Bulletins 42, 43 and 45 as well as in some CAG newsletters. In 2011 the Berryfield Mosaic was removed and a wall in the Well Room was exposed, which meant this could also be recorded.

With the closure of the castle for major renovation work in 2013 the opportunity arose to check for more. On 14th March we met with Tom Hodgson who identified where display cases had been removed and other walls newly exposed. We requested access back to the earlier Graffiti records to ensure whilst all walls were checked, work was not duplicated.

Five more visits were needed, one with Jean Roberts, where records were made and photographs taken. On completion, new sheets were filed with previous recording.

Whilst most of the graffiti were scratches, odd letters and similar marks, there were a small number of interesting finds, not seen before.

In the main hall, first left window niche, a 'mummy' used to reside. Pieces of graffiti here were already recorded but not measured. With access now possible I was able to fully record these and we discovered other unseen graffiti. What we had recorded earlier was a shield with a bar and two chevrons with the date (1872) along with some initials. Further in the niche I discovered the numbers 1680 and 1635. There were also initials above and below the 1635, suggesting this was a date reference with 1680 likely the same.

The two most impressive pieces of new graffiti were found in the second window niche. Both were difficult to get to, but needed to be recorded. On the left hand side a circle contained what appear to be four boats. Nearby are several crosses and other marks and on the opposite side several lines.



Circle and four boats.

Another significant feature is a figure standing beneath crossed keys, suggesting this represents St Peter, standing in an arch or doorway with a triangular top.



Graffiti in the second window niche

Upstairs, the line of pillars had already provided a number of names and dates. More faces were now revealed and recorded, with two pieces standing out from the rest; Geo Drury was kind enough to inform us that he came from Halstead, Essex. This could be a lead to tracing him! On the same pillar was the name 'Wallis'. Did Wallis Simpson visit the castle and leave her mark?

Because of the size of the castle, the number of walls and time constraints, not every single item of graffiti was recorded. Back in the early 2000's in the vaults by the Wheeley Tunnel, only samples were taken, nor did we record fully one of the walls in the prison cells. Apart from these two areas I hope every piece has been recorded but give no guarantee. Anything of historical or artistic importance should have been identified and if anything has been missed I hope it is only scratch marks.

Thanks to Tom Hodgson and museum staff for their assistance and to Jean for helping to get the work completed in the limited time available. Also Peter Berridge for originally instigating the Graffiti project, we look forward to seeing the full results in print. Perhaps CAG members could be involved in further research into specific names and designs.

Mary Coe