

## Medieval Graffiti in St. Mary's Church

After many hours of investigation over the summer, a survey of the medieval graffiti in St. Mary's Church has been completed, and a folder of the results given to the church wardens. It would appear that some of the internal walls of our church are more decorated than we thought!

Following the pattern of surveys which have taken place in other churches in East Anglia, the medieval graffiti in St. Mary's has been generally taken to be from the 1100's to the 1600's.

There is much graffiti from later dates in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but only a few of these later ones have been included, as their presence tends to be for an entirely different purpose to



those from medieval times! The medieval graffiti are the personal symbols and marks, etched into the church stonework, of both the masons who helped build our church and, more spiritually, the individual intercessions of the medieval churchgoers. The very act of inscribing the mark into the masonry has served to give the "prayer" greater potency. These symbols come in many forms: crosses, pentagrams, Virgin Mary marks, ritual circles, merchant marks etc. all of which can be seen in our church, but mainly



in the tower and its various rooms.

It is possible that the reason our medieval graffiti seems to be mostly confined to the area of the tower is because of the destructive fire of 1733. In that year, the spire, which sat on top of our tower, was hit by lightning and burst into flames. The fire was so intense that it melted the church bells and the spire toppled forwards through the roof of the nave, causing tremendous damage to the main body of the church. In the rebuilding and cleanup operation that followed, it may be that any graffiti in the main body of the church was removed.



Today, the graffiti in the kitchen is the most obvious, but be warned that, as elsewhere in the tower, some of it is only visible with the aid of a torch. By shining a light at an acute angle it is amazing how an apparently blank wall suddenly reveals the prayers of our church "ancestors" – personal moments of gratitude, humour, grief or devotion that have possibly been there for 500/600 years.