ALPHANUMERIC GRAFFITI AT ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL

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The 2018 volume of Archaeologia Cantiana featured a report on a photographic survey of over 800 pictorial and symbolic graffiti at Rochester Cathedral. This second article provides a summation of results from a survey of the alphanumeric graffiti; to date this diverse dataset encompasses 2,166 examples of names, dates, initials, letters and text either inscribed or marked in ink, pencil and chalk. The final report, to follow next year, will feature a survey of the estimated 2,500 twelfth- and thirteenth-century masons' marks.

It is estimated that some 5,000 graffiti inscriptions survive at Rochester Cathedral from the twelfth to the twenty-first century. 1,692 of these alphanumeric graffiti are inscribed (78 per cent), 336 are in pencil (16 per cent) and 80 chalk (4 per cent). The volume and diversity of this 800-year archaeological record lends itself to typological and statistical analysis.

The methodology for photographic recording of alphanumeric graffiti is consistent with that outlined in the report on the survey of pictorial and symbolic graffiti (see Scott 2018, 48). In addition, a transcription of each legible alphanumeric graffito has been recorded in the index of records spreadsheet. This spreadsheet and accompanying archive report have been made available on the Research Guild website.

Thirteenth-century decorative scheme

A large graffiti decorative scheme dating to *c*.1200 adorns the medieval fabric of the nave and crypt (Swanton 1979), the sanctuary and the west façade (Scott 2018, 49). Over 100 figures and scenes from the bible show a particular focus on the four evangelists. In December 2017, shortly after the report on pictorial and symbolic graffiti had been completed and submitted, the Perry Lithgow partnership removed a framed wooden panel from the wide pier in the south quire transept closest to the chapter library doorway for conservation work. This fragment of medieval painted wooden panel was removed from the quire and framed during restoration work in 1867 (Robertson 1876). The removal of this panel revealed the presence of a previously unidentified thirteenth-century graffito, part of the wider biblical scheme. The positioning of this example in the top east corner of the south face of this pier suggests that several other figures were once present. On the completion of restoration work the framed panel was replaced, although it is planned eventually to be moved to the opposite face of the pier. This example serves to remind us that

Fig. 1 Digital trace of thirteenth-century graffito of St Mark with his lion emblem on the east face of the easternmost Caen stone pier of the north arcade of the nave, showing recently identified text flowing from the writing desk.

whilst our survey has been thorough and encompasses all areas of the building, the placement of fixed furnishings and elements of post-medieval decorative schemes likely obscure a significant number of surviving graffiti. New finds are likely to be uncovered on a regular basis long into the future, revealed by conservation work and the decay of these later schemes.

It has since been identified that inscribed text is in close proximity to several of the figures and scenes within the scheme, and in at least one example the text appears to be in interaction with the image itself. On the east face of the furthest east Caen pier of the northern arcade of the nave sits an image of St Mark at a writing desk, identifiable by a large adjacent lion emblem. Letters and possibly words flow from beneath St Mark's writing implement – either a reed pen from antiquity or a medieval quill – onto the desk and into the space above his head (**Fig. 1**). Given its estimated early thirteenth-century date the text is almost certainly Latin. Frustratingly, however, it has not yet been possible to even partially decipher. It may be that these few lines of 'text' are representative of words, rather than consisting of actual prose, but other inscriptions within the same scheme are more extensive (**Fig. 2**). The context of these inscriptions, in association with biblical imagery with an emphasis on the four evangelists, suggests it may be verses from the gospels. A technique known as Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI) would almost

Fig. 2 (*Left*) Thirteenth-century graffito of seated figure, possibly another Evangelist, with several lines of undeciphered script. (*Right*) Further text above an image of an unidentified standing figure.

certainly aid in the decipherment of this text, the oldest in the building. RTI is a computational photographic method that captures a subject's surface shape and colour and enables the interactive re-lighting of the subject from any direction.

The cumulative effect of the images and text in this scheme may have been as though the architecture of this recent construction was rising from the words and images of the gospels themselves. Similar and extensive schemes also survive on Norman fabric at Canterbury Cathedral, St Clement's Church in Sandwich, St Mary the Virgin in Newington and the then Abbey Church of St Alban in Hertfordshire (Scott 2018, 57). It seems possible that all these schemes may have been created by the same artist/s at work at Rochester Cathedral. The identification of text accompanying the scheme at Rochester is of significance to the interpretation of these decorative schemes elsewhere. Attention should be paid to identifying any text in association with the schemes at these other sites.

Dates and dating

Four-hundred legible anno Domini dates have been recorded, from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century. Although included in just 18 per cent of alphanumeric inscriptions, these dates provide the means for creating a typology of the palaeography, content and medium of post-medieval graffiti inscriptions (**Fig. 3**).
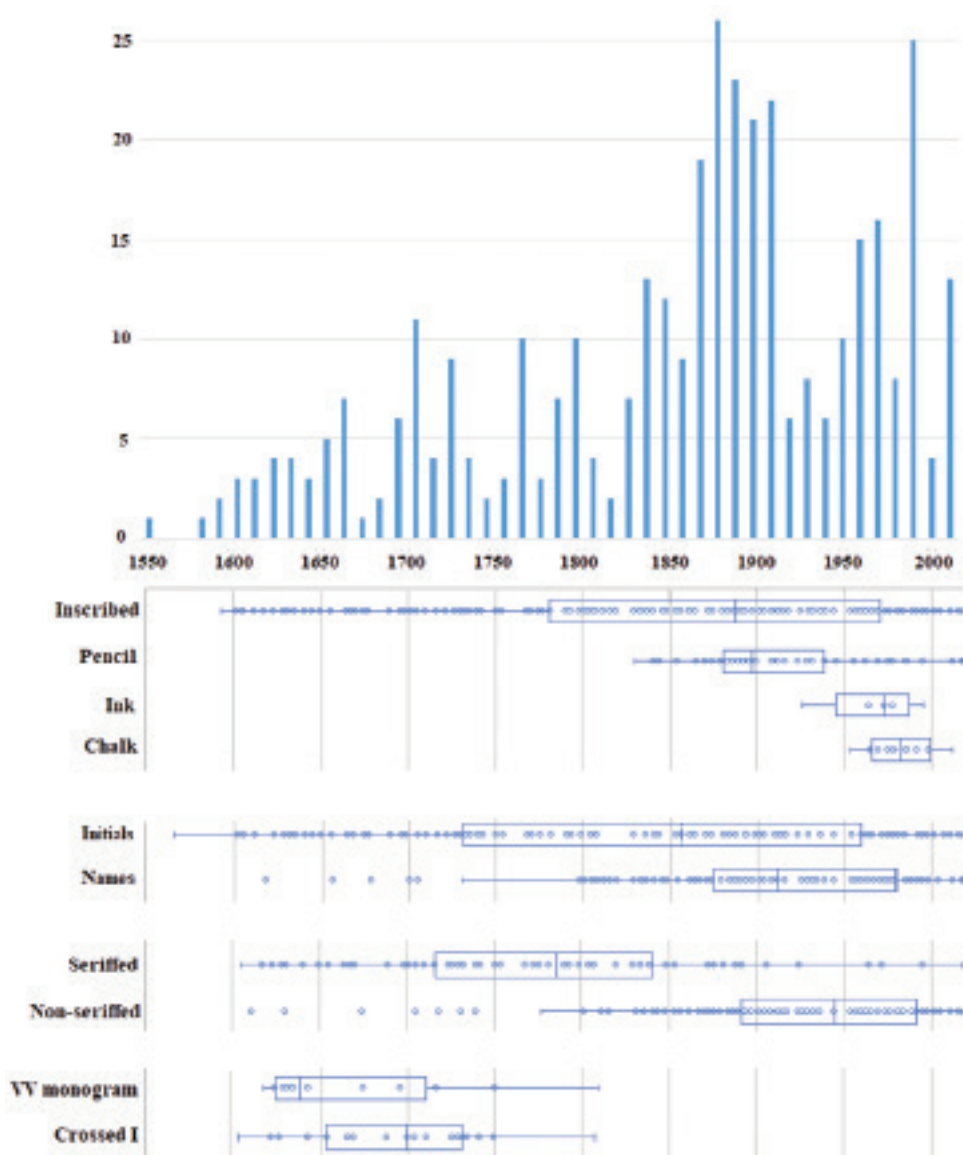
Fig. 3 (*Top*) Dated graffiti at Rochester Cathedral by decade. (*Bottom*) Dated graffiti by medium, form, seriffed/non-seriffed and the inclusion of antiquated letter styles.

54 calligraphic angular inscriptions are interpreted here as possibly late-medieval (*c*.1300-1540), or early post-medieval (*c*.1540-1650), although none are dated (**Fig. 4**, *left*). Many are fragmentary and exceptionally difficult to decipher, but largely appear to consist of forenames. One late sixteenth-century dated inscription in the Lady Chapel suggests the continuation of this calligraphic tradition into the early post-medieval era. 577 inscriptions (27 per cent of alphanumeric) have
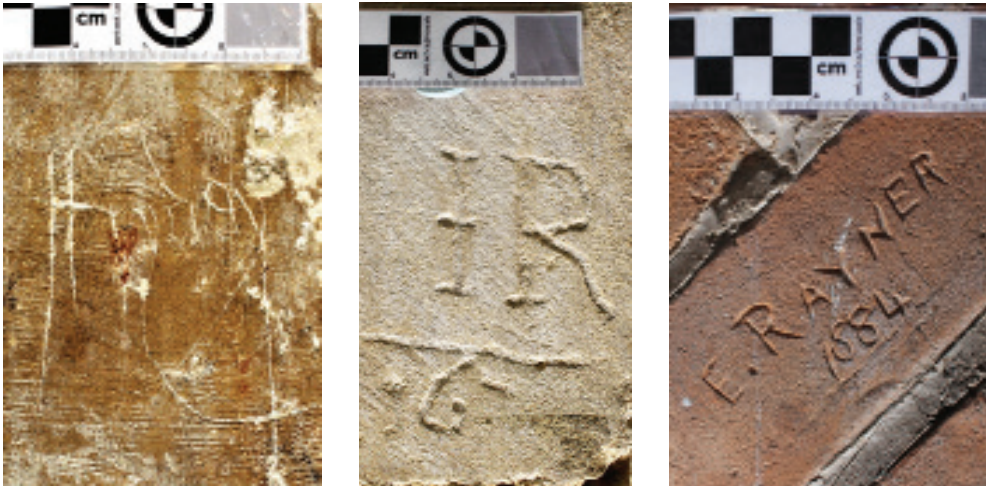
Fig. 4 (*Left*) Angular inscription, possibly late-medieval or early post-medieval. (*Centre*) Seventeenth-century seriffed inscription resembling printed type. (*Right*) Late nineteenth-century non-seriffed inscription.

been identified as seriffed. They largely seem to date from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Fig. 4, *centre*). 489 of these seriffed inscriptions (85 per cent) are in the form of one or two-letter initials. Several antiquated letter forms have also been identified within seventeenth- and eighteenth-century inscriptions at the cathedral, discussed below.

A spike in dated inscriptions in the nineteenth century coincides with its shift in acceptance. We can also observe a palaeographic shift over the nineteenth century, as elaborate and time-consuming seriffed inscriptions in very public areas of the building give way to non-seriffed inscriptions more likely to be found in corners of the nave and crypt, or in the upper rooms. Creating inscriptions becomes more of a hurried, clandestine act, being formed largely of straight, single lines and losing any extraneous portions (Fig. 4, *right*). 1053 non-seriffed graffiti have been recorded to date, being 49 per cent of all alphanumeric. Although graphite has a long post-medieval history, the earliest dated pencil graffito recorded at the cathedral is 1830. Ink and chalk graffiti are dated twentieth-century, although a chalk pictorial scheme described below may at its earliest be late nineteenth-century.

This observed shift from calligraphic angular inscriptions to seriffed and then to non-seriffed inscriptions is supported by stratigraphic evidence in the form of medieval paint or Early Modern whitewash surviving over earlier inscriptions or within their inscribed lines. Such evidence identifies inscriptions as being earlier than these decorative schemes and whitewashing campaigns and establishes a *terminus post quem* for many undated inscriptions. A *terminus ante quem* for many post-medieval and Modern inscriptions and sgraffiti (inscriptions formed by scratching through one layer of pigment or whitewash to reveal another beneath it) can occasionally be provided by documented building, furnishing or decorative campaigns.

When enough examples of particular pictorial and symbolic graffiti forms survive they can be seen to cluster around several spiritually significant areas of the cathedral such as shrines and altars (Scott 2018, 61). In contrast, alphanumeric graffiti clusters in only two or three locations in the publicly accessible areas of the building (**Fig. 5**). This is to be expected given the removal of altars and chapels in the post-medieval era. Alphanumeric inscriptions are also almost exclusively created from a standing height, as opposed to medieval devotional graffiti which can often be seen to have been created from a kneeling height, as if in the act of prayer itself. As elsewhere, it is highly unlikely that multiple altars were re-established within the cathedral until the advent of the Oxford movement in the nineteenth century, and possibly even later. This lack of multiple spiritual foci within the building can be observed in the largely disperse nature of public-area post-medieval inscriptions. However, several alphanumeric graffiti clusters are located in the non-public areas of the building, reflecting the newly clandestine nature of graffiti.

The inclusion of anno Domini dates within inscriptions from the sixteenth-century on allows for a more precise appreciation of graffiti cluster formation and growth within the context afforded by documented building and furnishing campaigns over this time. The archives of the Dean and Chapter of Rochester Cathedral are kept by the Medway Archive Office. Invoices, receipts, surveys and correspondence within these records for the years 1540 to 1983 has been indexed by Holbrook (1994). When we have referenced an indexed document here, the Medway Archives refence number is given. Holbrook's index has also been made available on the Research Guild website.

Eighteen of the earliest dated graffiti in the building are within a dense cluster on the north arcade wall of the Lady Chapel, from almost every decade between 1595 to 1723. In 1724 the Bishop's Consistory Court was moved to the north-east corner of the Lady Chapel from the south aisle of the nave. A plan of its new form survives, and it was reconstructed directly in front of this cluster (DRc/Emf/27). It is perhaps the preservation provided by the wainscoting of the court that has preserved such early inscriptions. There are three dates, 1731, 1750 and 1767 which indicate cluster growth continued for some time past its construction. The court remained here until well into the nineteenth century (Palmer 1897, 30).

Another cluster of alphanumeric inscriptions survive across the piers of the central crossing. Many of these inscriptions in this highly-visible area of the building feature decorated borders in the style of buildings, discussed below. The south-west crossing pier was extended and partly reconstructed in the 1820s. Several blocks have been re-used within the lowest two courses of ashlar. One features alphanumeric graffiti that has since been placed upside down. Five dates on the west crossing piers range from 1705 to a partially legible date in the 1880s, although most are eighteenth century. The construction of semi-permanent benches and an extension of the altar platform in the nineteenth-century marks the termination in growth of this graffiti cluster.

An early cluster appears on the square pier to the east of the south quire transept. This was in close proximity to the site of the medieval and post-medieval high altar, which was further west than its present site. Dated inscriptions include 1707, 1720, 1738 and 1754. Surviving fragments suggest many more inscriptions were

once present in the vicinity, including within the sedilia. Those that survive include one partially illegible date, possibly seventeenth-century, and the dates 1732, 1742, 1729.

Within the crypt, a disperse collection of seriffed inscriptions include the dates 1623, 1701, 1760 and 1875. The majority of other dated graffiti around piers and shafts, clustering particularly to the north and west of the main crypt body, include dates from the 1960s to 2014. A scattering of seriffed inscriptions are located on the furthest east piers of the Ithamar Chapel, although none are dated. The comparatively sparse early inscriptions in the crypt may reflect public access being periodically restricted over the post-medieval and Early Modern eras.

Letters and initials

Some 1,094 graffiti (51 per cent of all recorded alphanumeric) are two or three letter initials, and another 254 examples (12 per cent) appear to consist of a singular letter. The survey of pictorial and symbolic graffiti identified 127 examples of recurring stylised letters A, C, I and W with the aim of identifying potential cult marks (Graham and Scott 2017a, Scott 2018, 65). The letter W does not exist in Latin and so a portion of these 'letters' have traditionally been interpreted as instead representing a VV monogram: the initials of a Latin name for the Virgin Mary *Virgo Virginum*. Evidence for an apotropaic function of the VV monogram in folk magic traditions over the post-medieval and Early Modern periods is abundant (Easton 1999). Caution needs paying to this interpretation, however, as this same form is also a common representation of the letter W, as can still be seen in some fonts in use today. The letter J is also not present within Latin, being an evolution of the letter I. It has previously been suggested that the high occurrence of this single letter signifies an abbreviation of *Iesus*. The inclusion of these letters within inscriptions is believed to be apotropaic (Champion 2015). The completion of the alphanumeric graffiti survey makes possible a statistical analysis of letter recurrence with the aim of confirming the identification of spiritually significant letters and initials.

If single-letter seriffed inscriptions were created from a broad sample of forenames it would be expected that the most common letters to occur would be I, given that there are three male names on a list of 25 most-popular names since 1530 (nos. 1. John, 5. James, 9. Joseph) and one female name from a list of 25 most popular female names (no. 6. Jane) (Ancestry 2016). Given the absence of the letter J in Latin, this is reflected in the largest number of first-letters in two-letter seriffed inscriptions at Rochester Cathedral being I (**Fig. 6**). The most common letter to occur within single-letter non-seriffed inscriptions is W, mostly in the form of the VV monogram. In many examples, a non-seriffed W/VV monogram occurs within a seriffed inscription. This confusion of categories may explain why an overabundance of W/VV is less apparent within the seriffed inscriptions analysis. Only William makes it into a list of the 25 most popular forenames, as the second highest ranked. This overabundance of the letter W apparently confirms a ritual significance at Rochester.
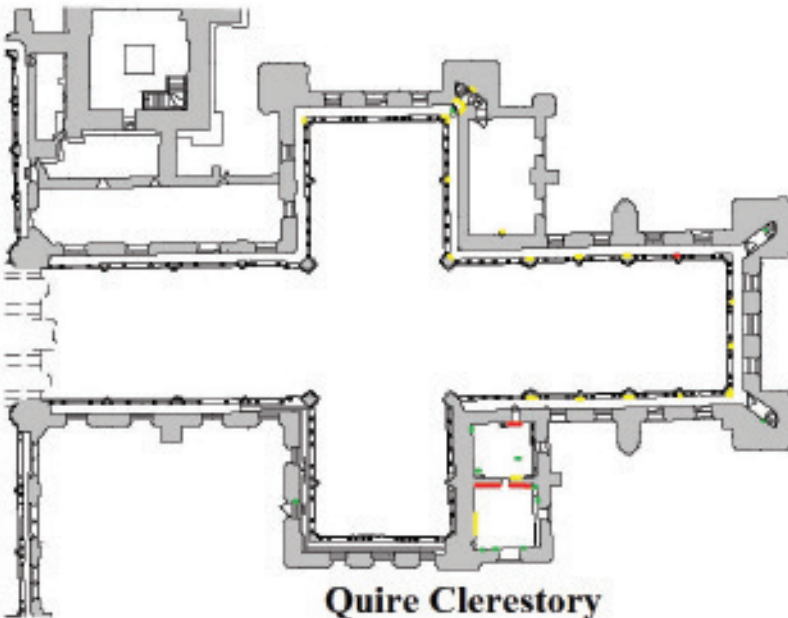
Although there is a huge quantity of initials beginning with I, with a significant portion of them being IC, the high ocurrence of names beginning with J within the

KEY

x = graffiti/m2

- $x \approx 1$
- $1 < x \leq 9$
- $x \geq 10$

Nave
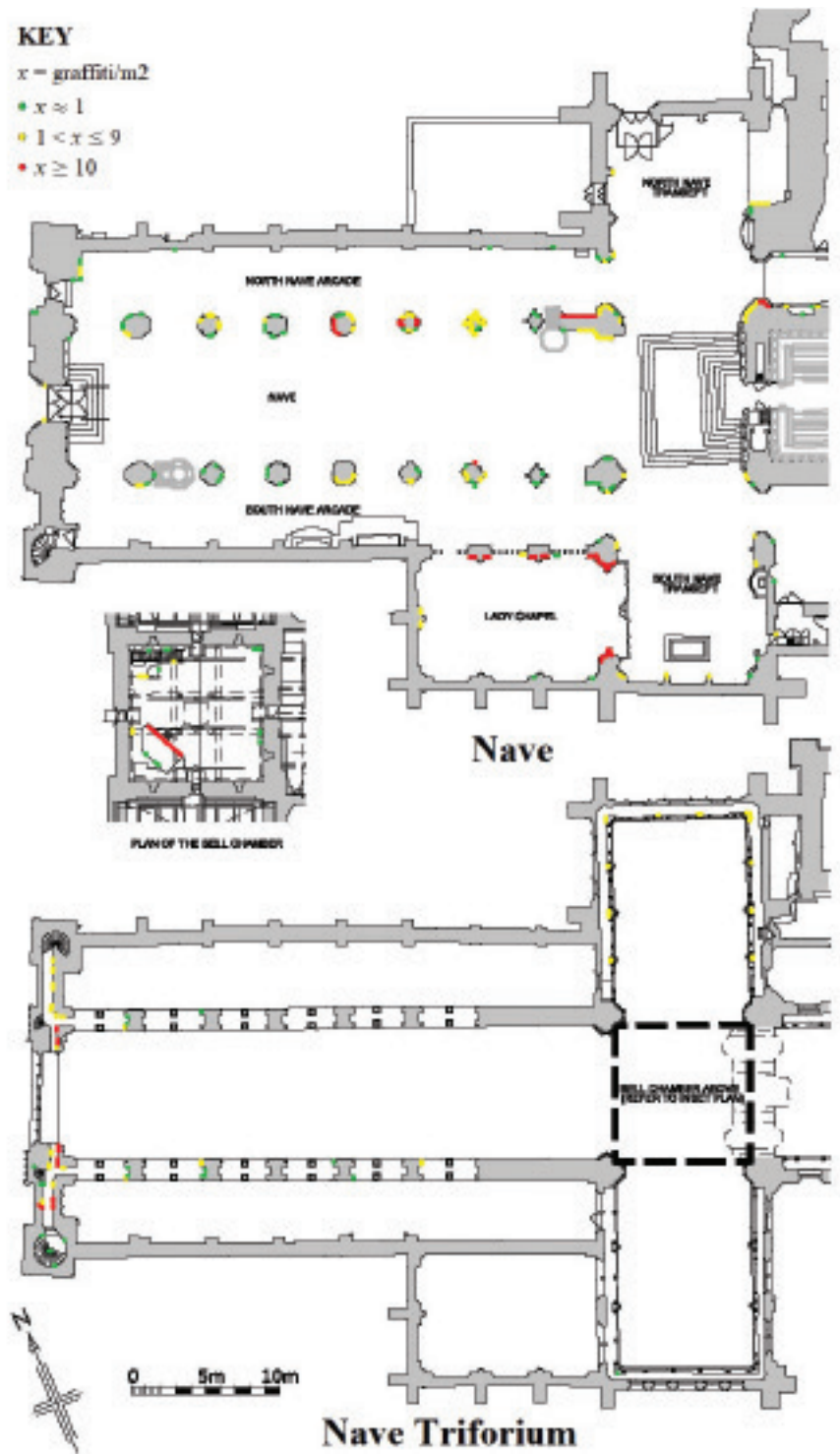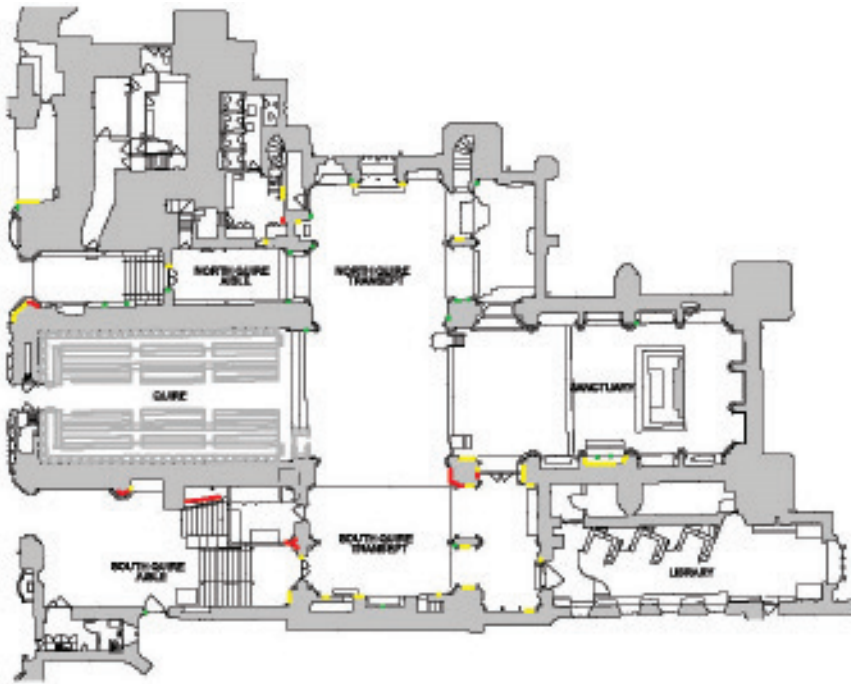
Nave Triforium

Quire

Quire Clerestory

Fig. 5 Nave, quire, nave triforium and quire clerestory plans, showing density
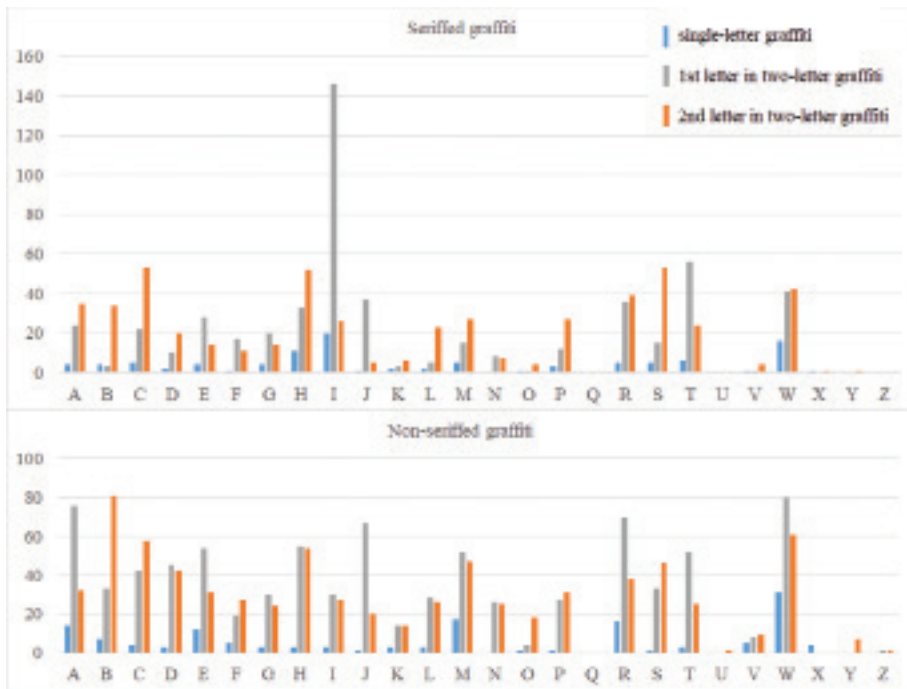of alphanumeric graffiti. (Graphic design: Alan Minnerthey.)

Fig. 6. Letter occurrence within single and two-letter seriffed and non-seriffed graffiti at Rochester Cathedral.

most common male names makes identifying I as spiritually significant from this analysis problematic. A quantitative analysis of the most common forenames over the period would be required to confirm an overabundance of I letters, although the first comprehensive census was conducted only in 1881.

The lack of any comparatively sizeable proportion of other letters within single-letter inscriptions suggests that no other letters served as cult marks at Rochester Cathedral in a comparable number. Small numbers of recurring stylised letters A (several of which could be interpreted as incorporating an M in their design) and C (Christ?) may indicate rarer modifications of the more common VV monogram and crossed I. The most common letters to occur as the second letter in two-letter inscriptions are relatively evenly proportioned. This is consistent with the first letter proportions of the most common English surnames within the 1881 census.

The significance of the crossed letter I and the VV monogram at the cathedral is supported by the diverse arrangements and settings in which these letters can be found (**Fig. 7**). Although difficult to identify within dense clusters of inscriptions, they can often be found within the same inscription as other sets of initials (Fig. 7, A-C). Some occur larger than these initials, or smaller, but can be identified from similarities in hand-styles and the means and execution of inscribing. Several may have been created alongside crucifix and one may be in interaction with a, presumably significantly earlier, medieval heraldic design (Fig. 7, D and E). There are instances with the VV monogram right-side down (Fig. 7, F), or more
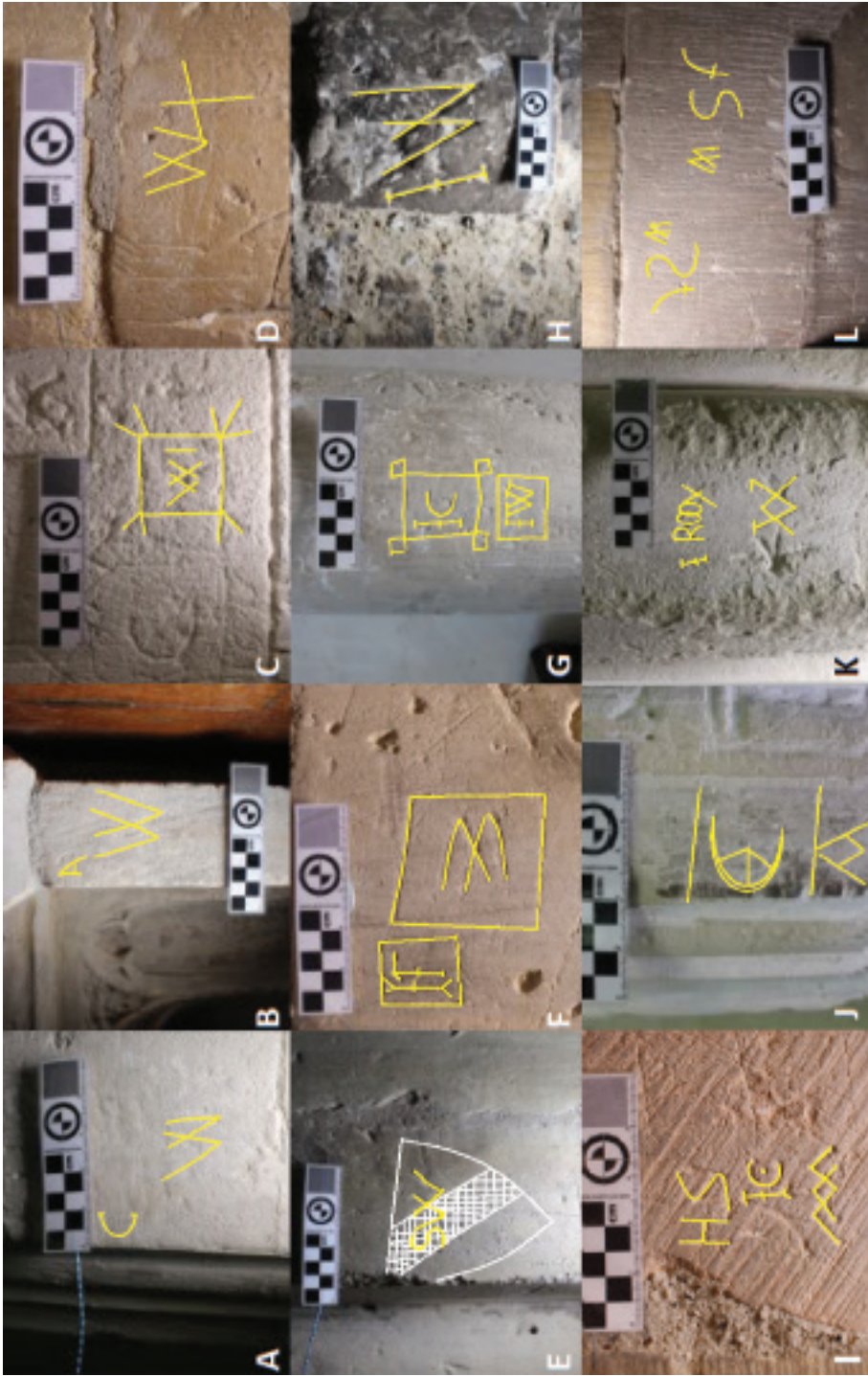
Fig. 7. A selection of inscriptions incorporating the VV monogram, sometimes upside-down into an approximation of an M, or A and M.

commonly upside down in an approximation of an M (Fig. 7, F). They cluster in the Lady Chapel but can be found in diverse settings around the building. Two heavy wooden doors restrict access to the room above the aisle to the east of the north quire transept, suggesting that the it once served as a treasury. The room is devoid of modern graffiti, but there are half a dozen seriffed inscriptions on the east wall arcade. These include several combinations of the VV monogram and crossed I (Fig. 7, G). A large IW also marks the entrance to the short passage leading to the room (fig. 7, H). Their location within what may have served as a treasury in the post-medieval and early modern era could indicate an apotropaic function against theft or fire. The initials IW or WI incorporating the VV monogram are the most common to occur within seriffed inscriptions. Several non-seriffed monograms may be later modifications of the VV monogram, sometimes taking the form of the overlapping letters A and M, possibly for *Ave Maria* (Fig. 7, I-K). Names or initials written backwards or in mirror image have previously been interpreted as curses. Only one example of such a backward inscription has been identified at Rochester Cathedral, on the east wall of the south quire aisle. An upside-down VV monogram is accompanied by the initials *Sf*, which are mirrored about 5cm away to the west (Fig. 7, L). Was a curse inscription later neutralised by the addition of the corrected initials?

It was not appreciated before the submission of the pictorial and symbolic graffiti report that arc, circle and multifoil graffiti have previously been interpreted as Marian symbology. These are the most common forms of symbolic graffiti at the cathedral. If this is the case, the 178 examples recorded to date is further evidence of Marian devotion at the cathedral. Many of these designs can be found within Early Modern graffiti clusters but only one or two within the Lady Chapel, constructed in the 1490s.

Initials within a square border with a triangular two-dimensional architectural canopy or pitched roof have traditionally been interpreted as funerary (**Fig. 8**). These inscriptions have been thought of as small and inexpensive replicas of the wall monuments appearing for the upper and middle classes from the later medieval and Early Modern periods. Although often difficult to decipher, most of these designs include a letter or a set of different initials outside the border, interpreted as those of the person creating the inscription (Fig. 8, A). However, these often take the form of a crossed I or VV monogram (Fig. 8, B and C). Champion (2015) notes that attempts to match the initials within inscriptions of this type with parish burial records have largely been unsuccesful. So it has been suggested that these inscriptions commemorate those who died abroad and their bodies not returned home. A faux-monument within the house of God may have offered some form of much-needed consolation.

Around 50 of these pitched borders have been recorded at Rochester, out of a total of 117 bordered inscriptions (Graham and Scott 2017b, Scott 2018, 67). The most detailed of these bordered inscriptions frequently include tiled roofs (Fig. 8, D and E) and flags (Fig. 8, E to G). An example of particular interest to the interpretation of these designs is one amongst a small group inscribed into the sedilia. A paved pathway apparently leads to the 'front' of the structure crammed into the narrow stone shafts dividing the canopied seats (Fig. 8, F). Another example substitutes two small crucifix for the more typical flags, springing from the bottom

Fig. 8. Decorated inscriptions, a form traditionally interpreted as an imitation of a commemorative wall monument or plaque, although the more intricate examples closer resemble a building with a pitched roof.

of its double-pitched roof (Fig. 8, H). There is also one inscription on a shaft to the south of the entrance to the north quire aisle which appears to depict a three-dimensional building (Fig. 8, I). Such examples make a funerary interpretation of these decorated inscriptions less certain. The tradition of leaving votive ships and other images close to shrines in the Middle Ages to assure safe passage or other benefit may offer an ethnographic analogy. As the VV monogram and crossed I are being incorporated within the earliest seventeeth-century bordered inscriptions, could they be commemorating (and immortalising) a visit during which a form of spiritual protection for the creator was sought? An evolution of medieval votive tradition, extinguished at the Reformation less than a century before.

Names and events

Graffiti including forenames and/or surnames totalling 558 have been recorded within the cathedral, of which 240 inscriptions also include dates. Matching named and dated graffiti to the cathedral's records is a relatively simple process, but these records are largely restricted to baptisms, marriages and burials. The vast majority of the cathedral community have gone completely unrecorded. Matching graffiti names with those in the census has proved unproductive, when no link can be established to Rochester or the cathedral. Matching undated names with noted historical figures has proved problematic. A partially-illegible pencil graffito in the nave apparently records the name and rank of a Col Heslop. A Colonel Richard Heslop was a Special Operations Executive who spent much of World War II in France fighting with the resistance. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order, Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur (Fr), Croix de Guerre (Fr), and the Medal of Freedom (US) for his service. Was this a memorial left by a friend or family member? A fellow soldier? Or the man himself during some visit prior to his death in 1973? Or perhaps, since tour groups regularly visit Rochester Cathedral from France, a member of the resistance who served with him in France left it? This could even be an entirely different 'Col Heslop'. Without identifying some connection of his to Rochester there is likely to be no definitive way of knowing.

On the north wall of the Lady Chapel a large, crude inscription reads 'Terrible Fb24 1760' along with four sets of initials, two partially legible: 'IC, PN, O?, D?'. The well-documented Battle of Bishops Court (aka 'The Defeat of Thurot') was fought between three British ships (HMS *Aeolus* – Captained by squadron commander John Elliott, HMS *Pallis* under Captain Clements, and HMS *Brilliant* under Captain Logie) and three French ships (the *Maréchal de Belle-Isle* under François Thurot, the *Terpsichore* under Captain Dessauaudais and the *Blonde* under Captain La Kayce). The Rochester connection to this battle comes from the frigates themselves. HMS *Aeolus* was a 32 gun, 5th rate frigate of the Niger class. Ten of these frigates were commissioned early in the Seven Years War, of which seven were built in Kent dockyards. On the 21st of February 1760 the French landed a force of some 600 French soldiers at Carrickfergus, County Antrim. The British squadron set sail from Kinsale, County Cork in response on the 24 February 1760. When the two forces met the French were soundly defeated, and Thurot was killed during the battle. French losses were heavy, with 90 men killed and a further 135 wounded. HMS *Aeolus* suffered only 4 men killed, and 15 wounded (Cust

1862, 47). If these initials are found to correspond to those lost crew members, this inscription would serve as a valuable example of an Early Modern commemorative and funerary inscription tradition.

Graffiti at Rochester Cathedral consists overwhelmingly of single names or single sets of initials. 160 graffiti (7 per cent of all alphanumeric) record two names within a single graffito, 23 record three names and 13 record four or more. John Brindley Parker Hopkins became a chorister in 1880 and George Frederick Hopkins in 1881, the sons of Cathedral Organist John Hopkins. Three pencil names in the crypt in the same handwriting record 'G. Hopkins / G. Hopkins / J. Hopkins'. As their mother's name is recorded in the 1881 census as Pauline Louise Dressler, the identification of one of these G. Hopkins remains a mystery. A cluster of 28 pencil graffiti behind a purbeck shaft at the east end of the south quire aisle records the names of choristers from the late nineteenth century. In many the date 'entered' and the date 'left' are recorded. The south quire aisle is used today by the choir as they wait to process into services.

Several of the largest graffiti clusters can be found within the non-public, seldom-used or most difficult to access areas of the cathedral such as the triforium, upper rooms and roof spaces. These areas are often self-contained and intimate environments in their own right. Some are likely to have been entered by only a few hundred people over the last 500 years. There is a sense of privilege upon entering a space which few others have before, accompanying an urge to mark the occasion. The obvious lack of redecoration, weathering or erosion of many thousands of hands such as which afflicts the lower areas of the building results in crisp inscriptions and a compression of time in such spaces. Both have seemed to act as a catalyst for the growth of these clusters. Hundreds of names of glaziers, plasterers, bricklayers, bell ringers and clergy are recorded. It has been possible to match many of these with those named in documented building campaigns over the last two hundred years.

The triforium – a gallery below the level of the windows – runs through the nave arcades and below the west window, around the nave and quire transept, and the centre quire and presbytery. At least 288 names and initials of workers adorn the reverse of shafts and piers, invisible from ground-level. They most often occur in small groups of just a few graffiti. Dated inscriptions occur every decade from the 1790s, with two legible inscriptions of 1703 and 1704 and possibly earlier partially obscured by thick whitewash. A Thomas Collier left three inscriptions on the quire triforium on the same pier, in 1798 and 1799 with a third date illegible. A. Edney inscribed their name in the Indulgence Chamber four times, in 1880, 1881, 1887 and at another indiscernible time in the 1880s. Other inscriptions by an A. Edney can be found on the nave triforium and on a wooden handrail in the south quire transept attic. An artful but undated 'James Oram' is inscribed on the obscured face of a shaft at triforium-level in the southern arcade of the nave. A James Oram is recorded as a plasterer employed from 1843 to 1848 (DRc/FTb/174, DRc/FTv/199, DRc/FTb/175, DRc/FTv/203). An S. Oram features in receipts for decoration and plastering from 1847 (DRc/FTv/202). Perhaps it was a relation of either of these that neatly inscribed 'Wm Oram' in the north nave transept triforium. H. Cronk created six inscriptions, in 1888, 1889, 1890, 1891, 1892 and 1898. A pencil cow graffito at the east end of the south nave arcade appears to be signed by an M.C.

Fig. 9. (*Left*) Graffiti inscriptions behind a pier in the triforium. (*Right*) High-contrast negative photograph of chalk graffito cavalryman on the wooden casing of the clock mechanism in the Bellringer's Chamber.

Cronk. Several other doodles are present amongst the triforium inscriptions, some crude and some skilfully crafted (**Fig. 9**, *left*), including a bird, a stick figure, and several sexfoil.

These are the most likely inscriptions within the building to include an occupation, significantly aiding their identification within the maintenance records. W. Carter lists their occupation as painter in 1815 in an inscription on the quire triforium. E. Holding and H.J. Parfit list their occupations as glaziers in an 1872 pencil graffito in the Indulgence Chamber. 'WNF' is recorded as a painter in an 1888 inscription on the quire triforium. Another painter – G Lane – lists their occupation twice, once in paint on the quire triforium in 1910, and again in an inscription in the Indulgence Chamber in 1916.

The largest graffiti cluster on the triforium is that on either side of the Great West Window where the wider passageway and enclosing walls provide a more secure walkway for the faint-hearted. Here 42 dated inscriptions occur almost every decade between the years 1731 to 1997.

A chamber above the small aisle to the east of the south quire transept is colloquially known as the Indulgence Chamber. This seems to be a modern naming and any evidence for an association with medieval indulgences is not apparent. An inscription on Caen stone at the south-west corner of the room is dated 1623, although there are no other early inscriptions here. The stairways leading up to this chamber from the transept and crypt below were filled with red brick by L.N. Cottingham during strengthening works in the 1820s (DRc/Emf/135). Access to

this room has since been limited to a route via the triforium, making this one of the most difficult areas in the building to access. Cottingham also had installed several iron braces and a red brick wall which now divides the chamber in two for structural purposes. It is this wall which has accumulated the largest modern graffiti cluster in the building. 224 inscriptions, many on their own brick, include 80 dates every few years from 1848 to 2017. It contains the most full-name inscriptions of any area of the building, including several members of the clergy leading up to the last 30 years. In several examples it is possibly to identify the same names every year or two for a decade or more. G. Hilburn may have started this tradition with an inscription dated 5 January 1848. The earliest of these inscriptions are seriffed. A. Edney, who's name features in six inscriptions around the building in non-seriffed inscriptions, has added serifs to the N of their name in an inscription dated 1881. This inscription is close to several mid-nineteenth century seriffed inscriptions. An inscription mimicking other seriffed inscriptions, apparently in an attempt to appear more formal, is of interest in our typological dating.

The large nineteenth-century wooden case of the clock mechanism within the Bell Ringers' Chamber features at least 80 chalk graffiti. They are among the most fragile graffiti within the cathedral. Amongst an untidy cluster of names and bell ringing diagrams are dozens of drawings of grotesque faces, men in bowler hats, flowers, a swan and a skilfully drawn cavalryman (Fig. 9, *right*). The central tower, within which the Bell Ringers' Chamber forms the lowest level, was used as a lookout during the First and Second World War and as a fire watch for some time after. The dates and times of bombing raids have been noted in a small cupboard in its north-east corner; May 29th, July 22nd, January 25th, February 1st, 15th, with two further days 1st and 8th of indeterminate month. Also within this cupboard are the pencil names of several bell ringers and members of clergy from the early twentieth century; 'Archdeacon Cheetham 1908', 'Archdeacon Rowe 1915' and 'Dean Storrs 1928'. The crypt was used as an air raid shelter during the world wars for those in the vicinity (DRc/Ac/26), although no inscriptions have been found dating to these periods.

Access to the triforium and the roofs is granted via eight spiral staircases; four within the west façade, two at the north of the north quire transept and two at the east end of the presbytery. In addition, the stairs to the Indulgence Chamber were blocked by Cottingham at the same time as another set of steps from the south quire transept to the crypt. Some of these access towers contain their own graffiti clusters. A disperse cluster can be found within the access tower at the north-east corner of the north quire transept, with 16 dates from 1856 to 1915. A door halfway up this tower leads onto the triforium, with the doorway including two partially legible seventeenth-century dates. The wear of the stone steps in this tower suggests this was a main access route to the Treasury, roofs and Bell Ringer's Chamber for many years.

Conclusion

The earliest identified alphanumeric graffiti at Rochester Cathedral dates to *c*.1200, part of a biblical decorative scheme with an emphasis on the gospels and their writers. The 400 inscriptions at the cathedral including an anno Domini date make

possible a typographic analysis of palaeographic styles and graffiti forms from the late sixteenth century on. Elaborate and time-consuming calligraphic angular scripts in the Middle Ages appear to give way to seriffed inscriptions in very public areas of the building dateable to the Early Modern period. In the nineteenth-century another change to predominantly non-seriffed inscriptions coincides with graffiti more likely to be found in corners of the nave and crypt, or in the upper rooms. Distinguishing between seriffed and non-seriffed inscriptions within large graffiti datasets may then aid identification of earlier inscriptions and clusters at other sites.

The majority of all graffiti in the building are in the form of single or two-letter initials. A high occurance of the stylised letter W within seriffed single-letter inscriptions supports a traditional interpretation that this 'letter' actually represents two overlapping V letters, a monogram formed of the initials of a Latin name for the Virgin Mary – *Virgo Virginum*. An appreciation of the diverse way in which this monogram is added to sets of initials appears to confirm an apotropaic use of this mark. Although difficult to quantify, the letter I also appears to be overabundant in the early graffiti record. Likewise, the manner in which this letter is used in conjunction with other sets of initials suggests an apotropaic function. Our analysis of letter occurrence within abbreviated inscriptions has been a very limited and preliminary analysis. A dataset should be identified providing a quantitive study of the most common names in Early Modern England, and preferably Kent, for comparison with the graffiti dataset from Rochester.

Inscriptions within a border with a pitched roof are a common form of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century graffiti at ecclesiastical sites nationwide. The most intricate of examples at the cathedral suggests that these images may be in imitation of buildings rather than monuments as has traditionally been interpreted. Instead then, might these decorated inscriptions be interpreted as immortalising a visit to the building? The frequent inclusion of the VV monogram and crossed I suggests that the act of visiting the cathedral and memorialising it in this fashion was spiritually significant, perhaps a form of ritual protection.

Alphanumeric graffiti presents a huge dataset with which to interpret Rochester Cathedral and other large ecclesiastical sites, and is a valuable historic record in its own right. Its decipherment poses the biggest challenge of all the graffiti in this survey and many inscriptions will never be fully understood. Nevertheless, the clustering of graffiti within public and non-public areas of the building allows us to understand the changing layout of the building and how generations of worshippers, workers and staff have related to the structure and its features over the last 800 years. This dataset is a diminishing resource, with photographic recording offering the only chance of preserving much of the most fragile graffiti. It has been within this project's list of ongoing aims to build a robust yet manageable methodology that other groups can use and build upon within their own buildings and archaeological sites, so that the data within these corpora is not lost entirely.

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