

Dig-ital Resource pack

Medieval Church Art (KS1 - KS2 / Primary) (History / Art / Design Technology)

KEY STAGE 2-3 LESSON TWO:

A Key Stage 2-3 lesson about graffiti and other carvings related to medieval and early modern churches in England. This lesson focuses on carvings discovered in the ruins of St Mary's Church near to the village of Stoke Mandeville in Buckinghamshire, during archaeological investigation, undertaken as part of the HS2 project. The lesson encourages students to think about the differences between modern and historic views on graffiti. It also investigates how archaeologists and historians can use these carvings to uncover more about the lives of ordinary people in the past.

Objectives:

- To discover the meanings behind the marks, graffiti and carvings often found in medieval churches like St Mary's
- To learn about the importance of churches to people in Medieval Britain
- To understand the job of a stonemason in medieval times

Teacher Objectives:

To encourage students to think about the historic uses and meanings of graffiti, in contrast with the connotations of the word today. To lead creative exercises in recreating historic carvings and promote creative thinking about their interpretation - establishing the basis for art-history examinations.

Children will:

Consider the history of their local area and the significance of graffiti in the past and their association with the church.

Provided resources:

Graffiti analysis exercise

Instructions for a 'design your own' exercise

You will need:

Air drying clay

Plastic or wooden clay carving tools

Estimated time: 40 min

Introduction

Archaeologists are currently working on behalf of HS2 to excavate the ruins of St Mary's Church in Stoke Mandeville. They are uncovering a wealth of archaeology that will tell us more about the history and past communities of Stoke Mandeville. The church and churchyard of St. Mary's is one of the most important historical sites being investigated along the route, and we hope that the archaeological work will answer many questions about the building and its surrounding landscape.

The church of St Mary the Virgin was built in the late 11th century, shortly after the Norman Conquest in 1066. Unlike the modern church, also called St Mary's, the old church was not located in the centre of the village. Instead it stood in the middle of an agricultural landscape, on land owned by the bishop of Lincoln. Near to the church there were a number of other buildings, like barns and a mill. The mill is mentioned in the Domesday Book, which lists information about who owned land in England after the Norman Conquest.

The church was built in the bottom of a shallow valley, which was naturally very wet. People working the land in the medieval period took advantage of this, creating a number of artificial streams and ponds. These provided water to the nearby mill and were later used for growing watercress.

When the new church in the centre of Stoke Mandeville was opened in the late 1800s, St. Mary's fell into disrepair, although the churchyard continued to be used for burials until 1908. The ruins became dangerous and unstable, and the church was eventually demolished in 1966. In total the church and churchyard were used for over 800 years. The landscape around the church has evidence for even longer habitation. Excavations have also been taking place at the site of a Roman settlement to the east of the church, where buildings were arranged on either side of a central trackway. This settlement appears to have earlier Iron Age origins. High status Roman finds, such as a coin and decorated pottery, suggest that a Roman villa may have stood nearby.

As well as these packs for schools, we have a Field Museum on site, over a number of weekends over the summer. Inside the museum is a viewing platform giving a view of the ongoing excavations, as well as displays, films and interactives enabling you to explore the history of St. Mary's church and find out about archaeological discoveries in the area. Come and see the excavations, meet the archaeologists and find out more!

Background and historical information:

Today we think of graffiti as pictures or writing which is spray-painted onto the outside of buildings. We see it all around towns and cities and some graffiti artists have become very famous. It might surprise you to know that in medieval times there was also a lot of graffiti! This wasn't painted but was carved into stone – often inside churches! Many people in the middle ages weren't able to read or right, so they expressed themselves through carving pictures. Some of these were related to religion, such as carved crosses (image 1), but they also included pictures showing all aspects of daily life. They also carved images which were supposed to protect them from witches and evil spirits! These sometimes looked like flowers (see image 2 below) and were designed to not have an obvious beginning or end so that the evil spirits would be trapped inside the graffiti like a maze!

Image 1:



Image 2:



Some of the marks we find in churches aren't just graffiti. The churches were built by stone masons who were master craftsmen. They would leave marks so that people could see who built the church, as well as so they could show the work they had done and be paid for it – pretty useful!

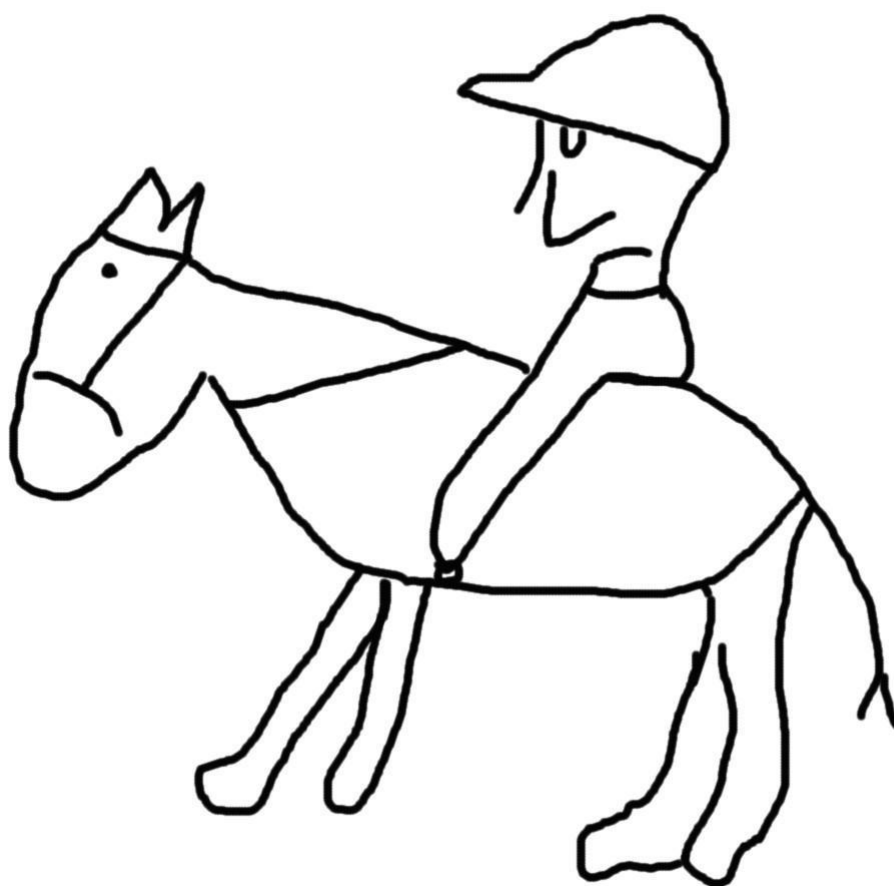
Learning Exercise 1:

In groups, look at the pictures of graffiti from churches around Buckinghamshire. What do you think they are pictures of? Why do you think people might have drawn them? Pick your favourite and tell the class about it.

IMAGE IDENTIFICATION CHART FOR TEACHERS:

A	A man and his donkey (Marsworth, All Saints Church)
B	Swaddled baby (Wingrave, St Peter & St Paul Church)
C	Daisy wheel (Hillesden, All Saints Church)
D	5-pointed star (Weston Turville, St Mary's Church)
E	Two birds (Great Horwood, St James' Church)
F	A shield (Stoke Poges, St Giles' Church)
G	Priest or bishop (Edlesborough, St Mary's Church)
H	Collection of 35 circles (Chalfont St Giles, St Giles' Church)
I	Woman with headdress (Little Brickhill, St Mary Magdalene Church)
J	Bird with a human face (Hardwick, St Mary's Church)
K	Priest or bishop (Chesham, St Mary's Church)
L	Animal? (Ivinghoe, St Mary's Church)
M	A pair of hands (Hillesden, All Saints Church)
N	Possible boat (Wendover, St Mary's Church)
O	Boat (Stoke Poges, St Giles' Church)
	<i>Graffiti images after Rusbridger & Rusbridger (1980)</i>

A.



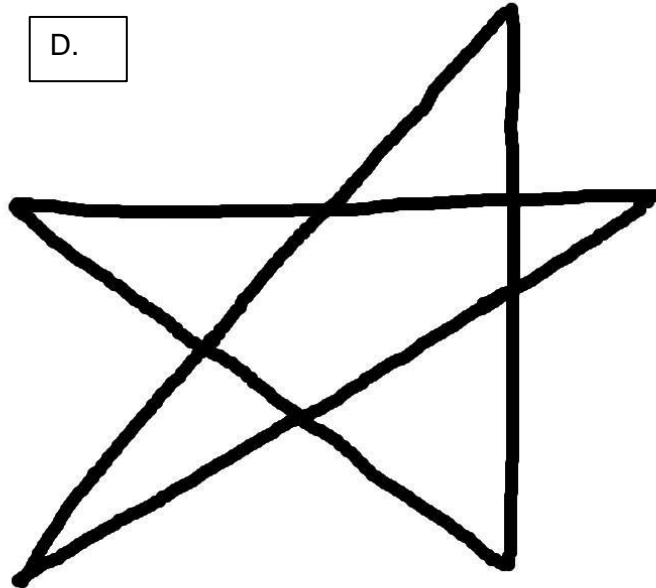
B.



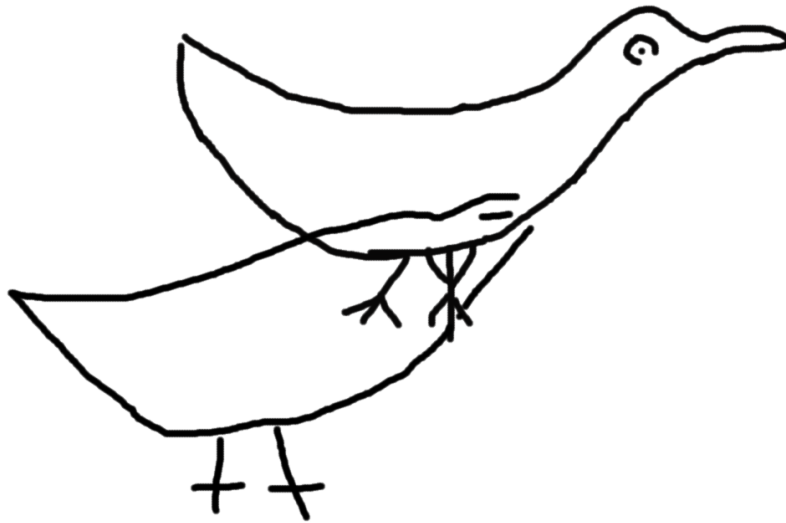
C.



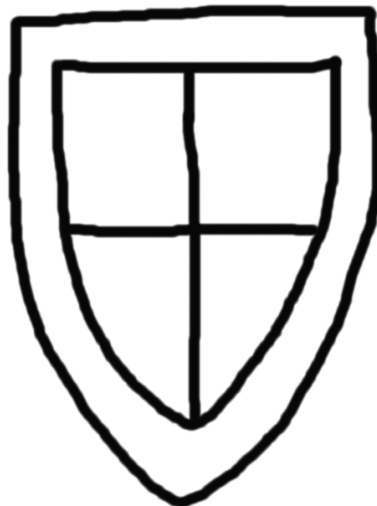
D.



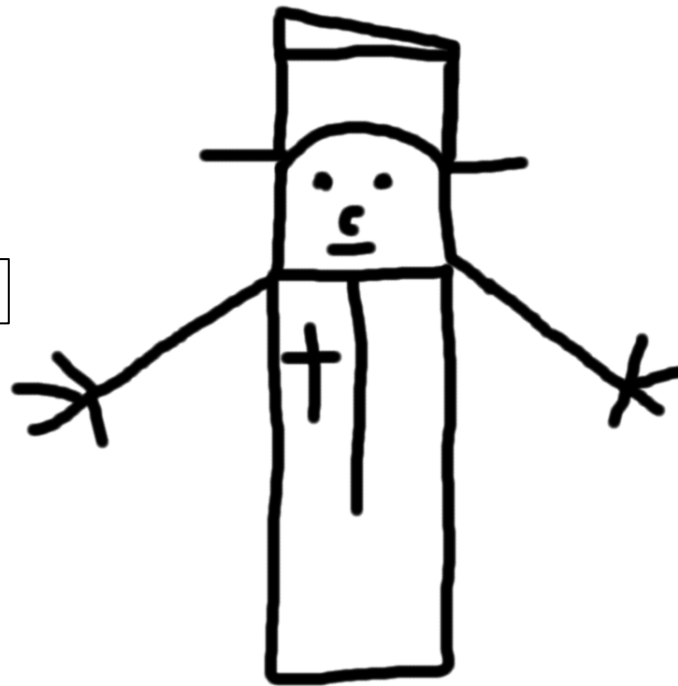
E.



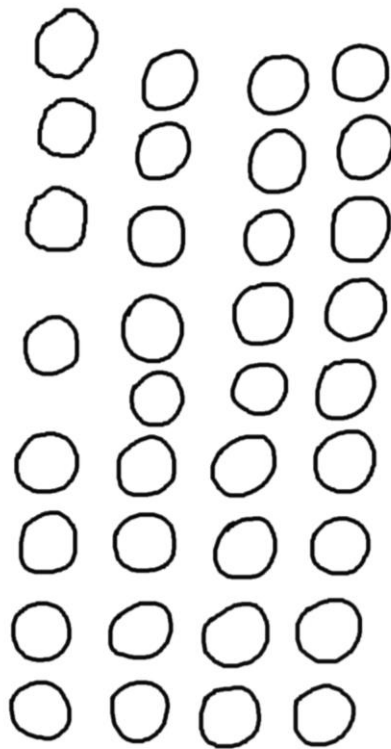
F.



G.



H.



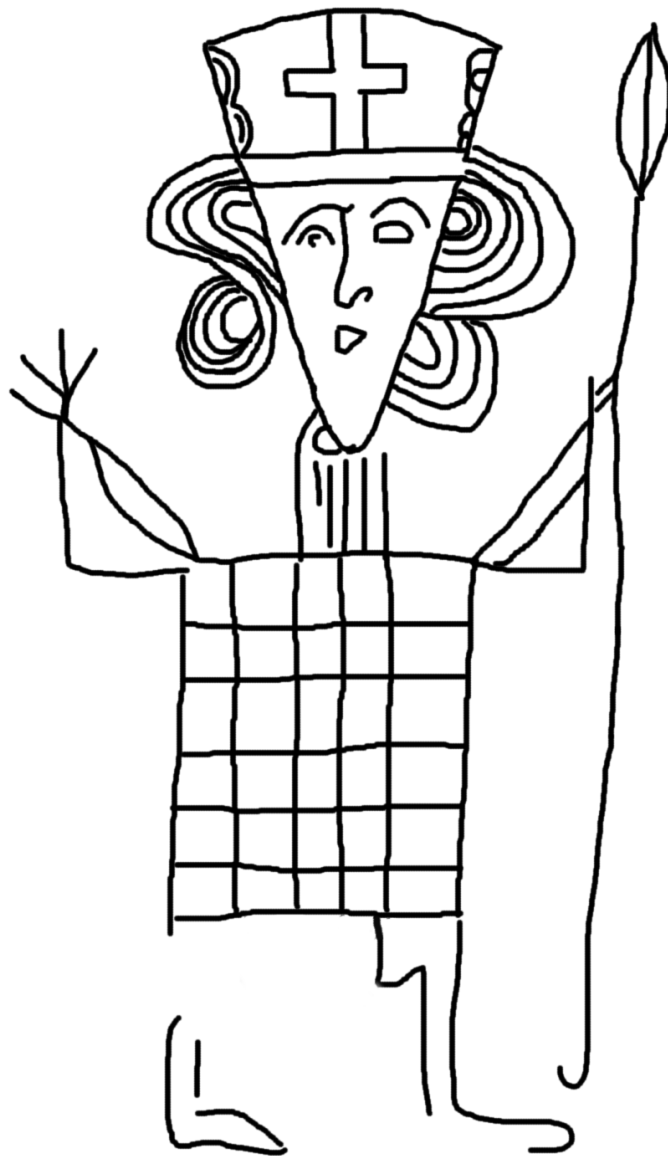
I.



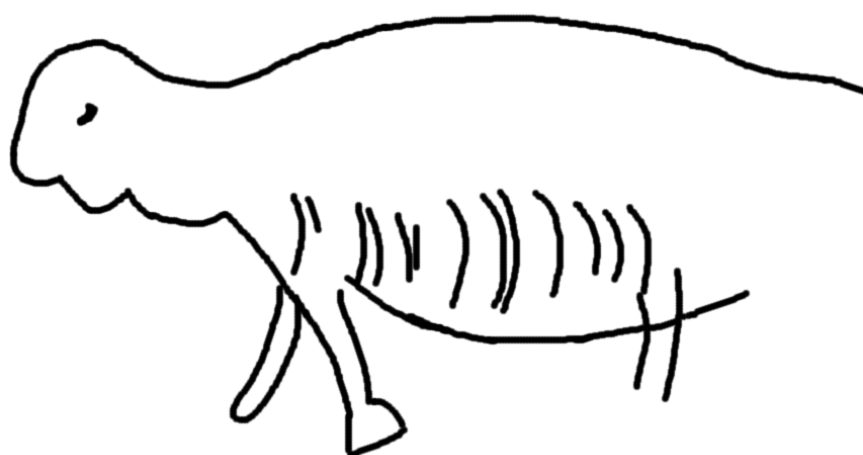
J.



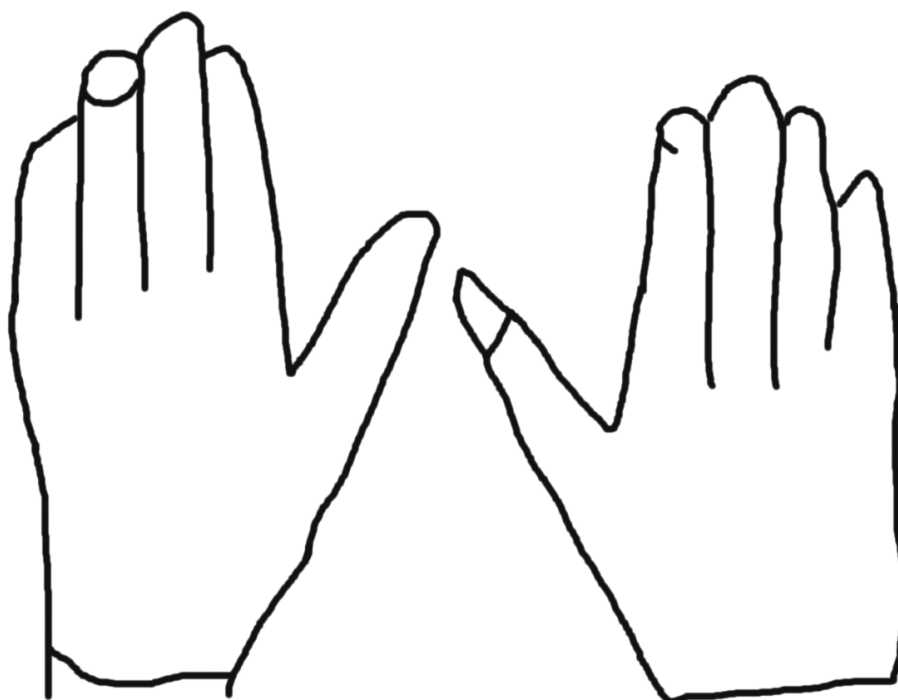
K.



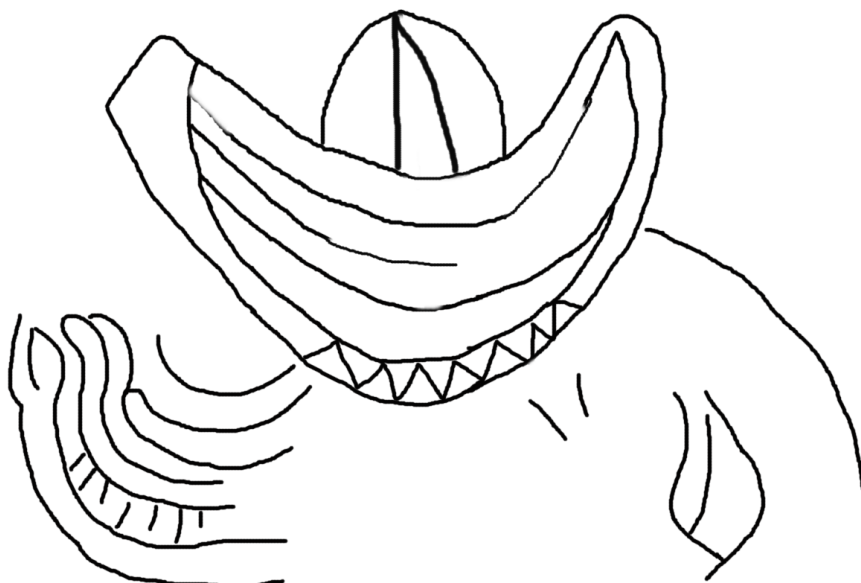
L.



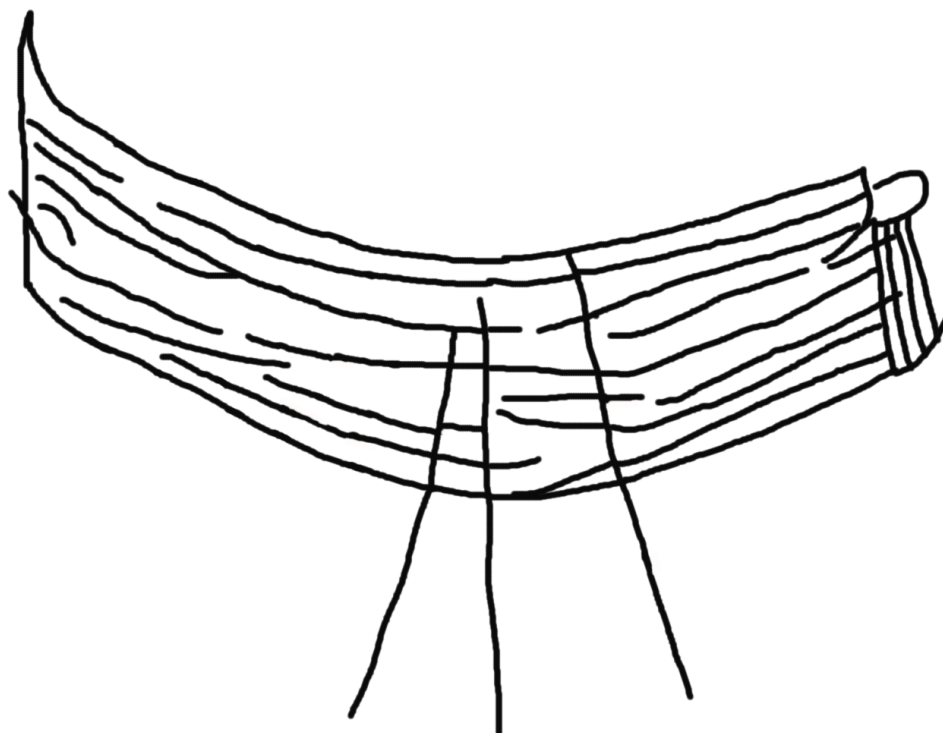
M.



N.



O.



Learning Exercise 2:

Use air drying clay and clay carving tools to carve your own graffiti or mason's mark or witch-mark. You can copy some medieval graffiti, or you can design your own!

Step 1: Draw out your design on paper (TEACHER'S NOTE: this step is optional, depending on time & class ability)

Step 2: Gently roll out your piece of clay. You want it to be about 1-2cm thick, so that it will dry quickly.

Step 3: Start to carve your graffiti design into the clay. Be careful that you don't cut all the way through!

Step 4: When you have finished, carefully put your clay onto a piece of paper with your name on. These should be put somewhere safe and will be dry in a couple of days.

(OPTIONAL: Show your graffiti to the class, talk or write about what have you drawn and why)









Conclusion:

Ask your students to reflect on the work they have done during this workshop. If there was anything surprising or interesting they found out. How many had thought of graffiti as a historic form of art before?

Think about the meaning of markings and what the people who left them behind would have thought of your analysis of their graffiti? These engraved drawings were found on the interior and exterior walls of churches in Buckinghamshire. Why do you think they were drawn there? How many relate to christian stories from the bible? Or are they copies of what you would see in the church everyday? For example the images of priests or bishops - could these have been caricatures (a picture of a person in which certain characteristics are exaggerated in order to create a comic effect) of people preaching at the church?

Homework ideas -

- Look up an artistic symbol of the catholic church such as the fish, crucifix, sacred heart, crossed keys ect. Find an example of them as church art (e.g. stained glass window, tapestry, carving) and make a drawing of it. Label it with what it represents and what church the art is from.
- Visit a local church and look to see if you can spot any historic paintings or graffiti on the walls of the building. Make a drawing of an interesting one you see and where it was from; which church and where in the church.