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Connecting Historic Graffiti to Past Parishes and Beliefs

Crystal Hollis

The Department of Archaeology and History, Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, University of Exeter, Exeter EX4 4RJ, UK; ch844@exeter.ac.uk

Abstract: Historic graffiti offer new and interesting insights into late medieval and early modern English society. This paper will show the value of studying these inscriptions by discussing two churches constructed in the late medieval period in Suffolk, England, with drawings of two figures that potentially represent the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child. These drawings are similar and yet quite different in their quality and execution, and they possibly relate to lost medieval imagery within the building. These images may also have been created in response to various iconoclastic movements that occurred as part of the Reformation as well as after it. This paper seeks to encourage further study on the relationship between historic graffiti and local history by observing the connection between the late medieval parish churches of Lidgate and Stradishall and their respective figural drawings by suggesting that graffiti serve a larger purpose than idle drawing or doodling and instead are valuable pieces of evidence about parish life and values.

Keywords: church archaeology; graffiti; iconoclasm; historic graffiti; Virgin Mary; Suffolk

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1. English Parish Churches and Graffiti

Many parish churches in England feature some form of historic graffiti. These inscriptions typically date from the late medieval and early modern eras. These designs have a wide variety of forms, sometimes as writing and sometimes as drawn designs or figures. People, animals, intricate designs, and the names and initials of past parishioners are commonly found on church walls. Graffiti have largely been overlooked when studying church spaces and how parishes used them. In the last decade, historic graffiti have, however, attracted more attention as useful artifacts but are often studied in isolation. These often-overlooked artifacts have much to offer researchers of churches and medieval and early modern spaces. Graffiti are part of a rich palimpsest of images and decoration in these spaces. They sit amongst medieval and early modern wall paintings, wood carvings, and empty niches. Sometimes these inscriptions relate to religion and evidence of votive and devotional behaviours, while other times they appear to have a more secular and social function, recording events that have taken place or commemorating a deceased member of the community. As graffiti are typically added over time over the course of several generations, many parish churches end up with a collection of inscriptions from a wide variety of eras and events, altering the function of the space from a sacred one to that of a time capsule. This piece seeks to address how graffiti are more than just errant "doodles" or meaningless drawings, and are rather important artifacts that can enhance the understanding of parish reactions to changes such as the Reformation, which began in the sixteenth century. While many of the inscriptions recorded are from the early modern era, some graffiti are medieval in nature and establish the practice of creating graffiti in churches. For this article, I will look at two churches, St. Margaret's Stradishall, and St. Mary the Virgin Lidgate. Both of these churches are in the Risbridge Hundred in West Suffolk and have a wide variety of graffiti. More specifically, these churches both appear to have images of Mary with Christ informally drawn on the walls. These drawings indicate a level of devotion in these parishes that may have survived iconoclastic movements in the Reformation.

The study of graffiti as an archaeological artifact or piece of art is relatively new. There have been publications regarding the subject intermittently for decades, each with a different focus or approach to the subject. The most complete of these works includes Violet Pritchard's *English Medieval Graffiti* (1967), which discusses select inscriptions from a variety of churches, including St. Mary the Virgin Lidgate, which will be discussed in this article. More recently, Matthew Champion's 2015 book *Medieval Graffiti: The Lost Voices of England's Churches* focuses on graffiti throughout England and their various interpretations. Many articles have also been written about graffiti in churches, though these often focus on one aspect or type of graffiti, such as ships or designs considered to have an apotropaic function (Brady and Corlett 2004; Dhoop et al. 2016; Heslop et al. 2013; Jones-Baker 1993; Plesch 2002). This paper will attempt to start to address a gap as it focuses on two inscriptions that mimic the style of formal artworks and place them within the historical context of the geographic region in where they are found.

2. St. Mary the Virgin Lidgate and St. Margaret Stradishall

The churches used in this study are located in the same administrative unit known as a hundred (Risbridge) in the county of Suffolk in England and were originally Catholic prior to the Reformation, which is when they converted to Anglicanism. This hundred is at Suffolk's westernmost point, and the parishes that will be discussed, while they do not neighbour each other, are located near each other. Stradishall and Lidgate are separated by two other parishes, Wickhambrook, which lies north of Stradishall and borders Lidgate to the west, and Cowlinge, which borders Stradishall to the east and Lidgate to the south. Both churches are similar in size and shape, with two aisles, a tower, and a porch.

Stradishall has a Norman era (late eleventh or twelfth century) nave, and the chancel was enlarged in the thirteenth century; the north aisle was added in the early fourteenth century, and the south aisle was added in the mid-fourteenth century, with the addition of a porch in the fifteenth century (Bettley and Pevsner 2015; Goult 1990b). The church had a guild dedicated to St. Margaret, which served the purpose of providing torches to burn in honour of God, Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and St. Margaret (Kamerick 2002). The church had a full-sized chancel screen with a rood that was taken down during the Reformation, but the lower section of the screen is present and preserved, and some of the lower panels were reused in the church rectory for windows, with other parts of the dado displayed in the church today in a frame (Cautley 1982). This brief building chronology demonstrates that St. Margaret Stradishall was a fairly typical English parish church and that there was certainly a strong following of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the parish community. It also shows that this church, like many in Suffolk, started as a small aisleless building but then as populations and wealth increased was able to expand to include two aisles in a relatively short period of time. There is also evidence of the impact of the Reformation and iconoclastic movements that occurred.

Lidgate also features a Norman nave and a thirteenth century chancel; the tower was added in the late thirteenth century or early fourteenth century, and there are not exact dates to when the aisles were added to the structure, though it is agreed that the structure is largely thirteenth and fourteenth century (Bettley and Pevsner 2015; Goult 1990a). Lidgate has a complete medieval screen still present in the chancel arch, and the presence of an altar to St. Anne has been recorded, but there is not necessarily a guild associated with this church (Cautley 1982; Redstone 1904). The church is dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin, which again indicates devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The current lady chapel likely served as a chapel St. Anne, and it is suggested that what is now the vestry was dedicated to the image of Mary the Mother (Foreman 2016). Again, in the building chronology there is a clear pattern of devotion to the Virgin Mary in this church, as well as evidence of the growth of the parish. There is not as much overt evidence of the impact of the Reformation in this church as there is at Stradishall. This is because the medieval screen is still intact; however, the walls here are heavily whitewashed.

During the Reformation and later in the Civil war, England experienced several intense waves of iconoclasm, which impacted not only the liturgy and religious practice but also how parishioners used church space and the images that they used to populate that space. Prior to the Reformation, images were heavily featured in church spaces. Wall paintings encouraged devotion to Christ, the Virgin Mary, and various saints and also told stories from the Bible to remind the congregation of themes such as the end of days or social rules (Duffy 2005; Gilchrist 2018; Reiss 2008). Statues were often used as portals to communicate with saints, allowing for parishioners to express their worries or requests within the church in the hopes that the saints would resolve them; this often could turn into an almost transactional relationship where the image or object was considered to be a tangible part of the parish with its own duties to uphold (Duffy 2005; Marks 2004). The iconoclastic movements of the Reformation focused on not only restricting the access to and interactions with these various images but also their presence and display within the church itself (Aston 2016; Marshall 2012).

Before discussing the graffiti found in these spaces, it may be helpful to understand the wider context surrounding the Virgin Mary and images of her that would have been used and found in medieval churches. During the twelfth century in England, the Virgin Mary's popularity increased, with altars and chapels dedicated to her proliferating throughout England (Marks 2004). Mary also became a popular saint for guilds to align themselves with, hence her association with guilds and confraternities in urban places such as London (Du Boulay et al. 1985). Mary was viewed not as just the mother of Christ but as an important aid for intercession and a model for being a "good woman" and mother, and she was to be revered as the Queen of Heaven (Blud et al. 2019; Marks 2004). The veneration of Mary was so prolific that by the late middle ages her popularity and rivalled that of Christ (Rosewell 2011). By the time the churches of Lidgate and Stradishall were built in the later medieval period, the importance of Mary and her images would have been commonplace in England and a part of regular worship and everyday life. It is important to note that while religious trends can be observed broadly, many traditions were localised, and so with Mary's images being prolific throughout England, it is likely there were slight variations in how parishioners would have interacted with them directly.

With regards to wall paintings of the Virgin that have been observed, there are dozens scattered throughout the country in a variety of formats. Some paintings dedicated to her feature her monogram as a backdrop or symbols like flowers, which mimic what occurs in pilgrim badges (Rickerby 1999; Spencer 2010). There are paintings that feature different stories of her life, such as the series of paintings showing her annunciation at St. Thomas Salisbury, or her series of miracles, which are presented at Eton College in a private chapel (Rosewell 2011). Some paintings that have survived look similar to the two drawings that will be discussed in this article, such as the painting of the Virgin and Child from All Saints Shelfanger, which shows a crowned Virgin holding a crowned Christ Child (Rosewell 2011). The inscriptions in these churches also bear resemblance to other types of medieval art, including seals and drawings. Examples can be found in the Princeton Index of Medieval Art. Two seals, one from Cultram Abbey and one from Simon de Luton, show images of the Virgin with a halo holding Christ. The seal from Cultrum shows the Virgin gazing out at the viewer, but the seal of Simon de Luton appears to show the Virgin looking at Christ similarly to the drawings at Lidgate and Stradishall (The Index of Medieval Art 2023, Princeton University: 77702, 93384). Other drawings, such as the drawing on a tomb, show a seated Mary holding Christ while she looks in the direction of the donor, who kneels at her feet praying (The Index of Medieval Art 2023, Princeton University: 162088). A diptych from the Walters Museum also portrays Mary as seated while being crowned with a wreath while holding and looking at Christ on her lap (The Index of Medieval Art 2023, Princeton University: hds20231031001). These representations show that the Virgin was regularly represented holding Christ while looking at him. There is variation with regards to if Mary and Christ are crowned in some of these depictions; however, the wall painting at Shelfanger shows that depictions of both Mary and Christ as crowned were created in

ecclesiastical contexts. It is important to establish the precedence for this particular design as it demonstrates the possibility and likelihood of exposure to this image that could have been copied as graffiti later.

In the same hundred as Lidgate and Stradishall, there are records of a chapel dedicated to Mary in Clare and a chapel at Stoke College dedicated to her in Stoke by Clare, as well as a priory that was dedicated to her in Chipley, which was associated with Poslingford as well (Morley 1926; Page 1907). Churches at Withersfield and Poslingford are also dedicated to St. Mary. In nearby Cowlinge, a wall painting of the Virgin Mary and St. Michael depicts her reaching across the chancel arch to tip the scales of St. Michael as he weighs souls in order to intercede on their behalf, which resembles other artworks from this era such as alabaster statues (Kamerick 2002). From these brief details it is clear that Mary's presence in this region was a fairly common and popular one, which follows trends occurring in other areas of England at this time. In places such as Brook near Canterbury, wall paintings showing her life cycle have been found, demonstrating her importance as large spaces in the church were reserved for paint schemes of high importance to either the parish or local patrons (Blud et al. 2019). In addition to fixed images in a building, such as statues and paintings, the late medieval period also featured Mary heavily in pilgrim badges. She is sometimes referenced either by symbols or letters on ampullae and badges that have been found in various deposits throughout England, again highlighting her importance to medieval English communities and religion (Spencer 2010).

The images found in St. Mary the Virgin Lidgate and St. Margaret Stradishall both feature two figures, one small and one large, looking at each other. Given the context and location of these images—in churches—it is feasible that they are both representing the Virgin Mary holding Christ. Given that both of these images do not appear to be recently created, it can be considered that these images may serve as responses to the Reformation movements, iconoclasms, and the change from Catholicism to Protestantism and later Puritanism. It has been suggested that graffiti in the medieval era allowed pilgrims to leave "parts of themselves" at holy sites to maintain an individual presence at a devotional site; this paper suggests that later graffiti served the purpose of not allowing old traditions and memories to fade by incorporating them into the building fabric to continue with the devotional use of a space that was under threat of loss (Ritsema van Eck 2018). This is highly significant as there are few resources that are available that demonstrate local-level responses to iconoclastic movements that are not based in documentation. These two drawings are potentially material evidence of attempts that were made to preserve a more Catholic-like way of worship in rural England and resist Protestant and iconoclastic movements, though more data from future studies would help solidify this hypothesis.

3. The Figural Graffiti of Lidgate and Stradishall's Churches

Looking at St. Mary the Virgin Lidgate in Figure 1, it can be observed that the quality of the drawing here is very fine. The image is roughly 20 cm across including both figures and about 18 cm high. It is located in the western end of the church on a pier surface that faces north and is drawn about 1.5 m from the ground. The lines are faint to where annotation is required as they are shallow and fine enough that photographing the inscription, even using a raking light technique, is challenging. There are no obvious mistakes that have been made, and the lines that form the rounded parts of the faces are smooth and unbroken. The figures appear to be looking at each other and seem to make eye contact. Both figures have crowns on their heads as well. The location and placement of this inscription within the body of the church is in the west end of the nave on a southern pier. It is not inscribed in an obvious area of the building and is carved in a fashion where one would have to look towards the east and the high altar in order to create this design. Given their design and crowns, it can be suggested that this is a drawing of the Virgin and Child. This conclusion has been reached by prior scholars of graffiti, including Violet Pritchard and Doris Jones-Baker (Jones-Baker 1993; Pritchard 1967). It is important to clarify that there do not appear to be any other confirmed drawings of the Virgin and Child in graffiti throughout England

as there are no mentions of drawings like this in the currently accessible surveys or reports (though there are other possible ones such as at Carlisle cathedral) and that often times this conclusion is based on the use of evidence in wall paintings and manuscripts as they demonstrate what typical depictions of religious figures were (Pritchard 1967). It can be observed in the same image that there is also more modern writing in this space, as well as older writing from the late medieval period. Graffiti often appears in palimpsests, with a mixture of inscriptions from different time periods present and, in some cases, overlapping. Many dateable inscriptions can be roughly dated from the style of writing or shapes of letters used. Drawings, however, are more challenging to date and the context within the building has to be relied upon.

Figure 1. A drawing of what appears to be the Virgin Mary looking down at the Christ. The lines here are fine and shallow; annotation has been added so that the reader can see the drawing more easily.

The drawing at Stradishall in Figure 2, however, is entirely different. It is a large drawing of two figures with the larger figure 55 cm tall and the smaller figure about 20 cm tall, inscribed deeply and prominently in the chancel arch with the heads at about 1.5 m above the ground, with the central portions of the body so unreadable and damaged that 3D imaging was required in order to see the full inscription (see Figure 3). Despite the damage present, the original drawings are deep enough that they would have been easily visible—especially through any paint or plaster that may have been applied to the wall surface. The faces are crude and jagged, and there do not appear to be crowns on either figure but instead very jagged and wildly inscribed hair. The lines of the graffiti itself are deeper and messier, though still very deliberately carved and created. Careful observation will show that the large figure has an extended arm and is holding the small figure, both appear to again be making eye contact, and their mouths also look open as if they are speaking. The large figure is standing, as can be seen in the image created by photogrammetry in Figure 3, and there are crude attempts at decoration on her dress in the form of pock marks that continue down the body and end in a hem. The smaller figure appears to have an arc that may serve as a halo above his head, but there is no real discernible detail to the clothing he wears apart from the lines that look almost like stripes but could serve as folds of cloth. There is a large compass-drawn circle behind the heads of the two figures; however, this is likely not related to the drawings as it more similarly

resembles the layout for a consecration cross. Given the placement of the image, which is close to the altar and the holier space of the church, it is possible that this is also a drawing of the Virgin Mary holding Christ. The majority of the other graffiti in the building are on a pier near the doorway of the church in the nave, with a small number of inscriptions present in the chancel arch, a portion of which can be seen in Figure 4, and two drawings in the window sills of chancel windows. This distribution also hints and the importance of the placement of this one image as it is not grouped with the other large group of inscriptions present, and it is more set apart and visible in a space that would have been associated with holiness.

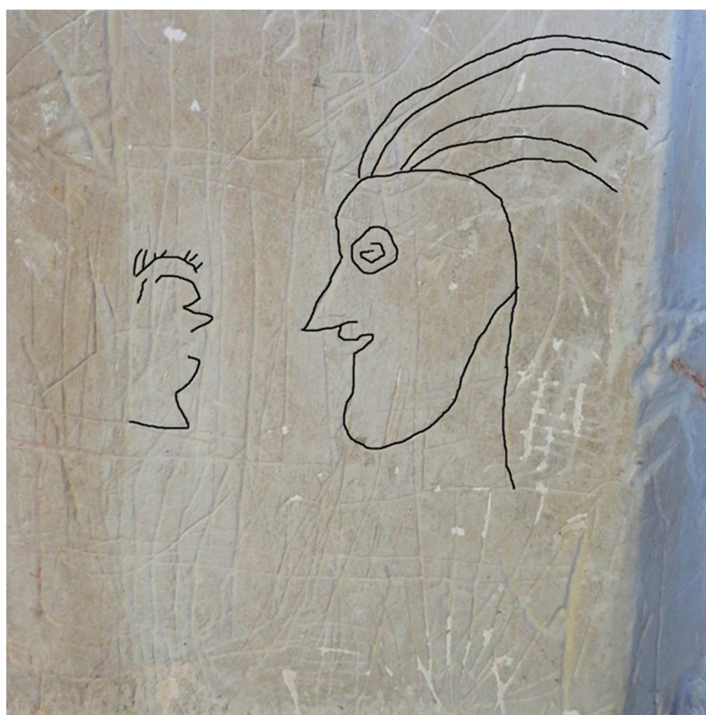

Figure 2. Close-up view of the two faces at St. Margaret Stradishall. Annotation has been added as the large quantity of lines can obscure the images.

Apart from the quality of drawing, the most obvious difference between the drawings is their placement. One is in the west end of the church on a southern pier, while the other is located on the southern part of the chancel arch; though it is difficult to tell what the actual visibility of these inscriptions would have been, the depth of the marks at Stradishall suggest that at least that inscription was meant to be easily viewed. The divisions of space in the medieval and early modern periods with regards to churches were quite significant, with the nave largely the domain of the laity of the parish and the chancel mostly accessible to only the clergy in the medieval period. As the Reformation movements took place, these divisions could become more blurred in different parishes, as often times the chancel would be used for seating for the social elite (Aston 2016; Fincham and Tyacke 2007). The placement of the drawing in Lidgate suggests that it could theoretically be from either the medieval or early modern era, as the nave space would have been open to all in the parish. The placement of the drawing in Stradishall, however, suggests that this drawing may have been made closer to the early modern era as rules regarding space and access in churches would have changed, allowing more free access to the chancel spaces. The image itself is not dateable, so it is impossible to tell if it dates from a stage of the Reformation that still allowed images of the Virgin, Christ, and the cross or if it is from a later, more Puritan stage that encouraged an almost total destruction of all images regardless of what they represented (Aston 2016; Marshall 2012). The presence of these graffiti suggests some kind of resistance to Protestant and iconoclastic movements rather than idle drawing or

"doodling". The frequency with which graffiti is found in England's churches suggests it was a generally accepted practice, though there are records of churches in Italy and the Netherlands that did not permit or encourage this practice, and it is possible that some English churches may have shared this sentiment (Ritsema van Eck 2018). While it is not possible to gauge the reactions of other parishioners who shared these spaces, the fact that both of these images are still fairly "readable" suggests that other members of the parish were not concerned with erasing or damaging these images despite iconoclastic orders and rules and that it is probable that the images were not looked down on and their creation was likely not discouraged.

Figure 3. Image of both figures at Stradishall. This was created using photogrammetry and allows for the full inscription of Mary to be more easily observed.

Figure 4. A portion of a pier in Stradishall that contains the majority of graffiti in the church. It can be observed there is a wide variety of inscriptions overlapping in a palimpsest.

In addition to these drawings having more Catholic themes than Puritan ones from the Reformation period, both of the churches have some documentary evidence of continuing to involve images and saints in their ministry after the Reformation. Sequestrations of clergy members in the seventeenth century were harsh, where incomes and estates were often seized in addition to clergy being reduced to either beggars or schoolmasters (Page 1907). These sequestrations were carried out under Puritan rule, with many clergy being persecuted for not being "Puritan enough" or being "scandalous" (Bullen 1925). In these sequestration records, other nearby parishes of Stoke by Clare, Gazeley, Kentford, Dalham, and Stansfield are also mentioned, suggesting that more of the region was not adhering to Puritan regulations than would first be apparent. Lidgate is not listed; however, Stradishall is. In 1644 William Proctor was tried for his delinquency after being a rector of the parish for more than a decade (Bullen 1926). The exact "scandal" is not listed, and so it is difficult to determine the extent to which Proctor was not following Puritan rules and ideologies; however, this sequestration as well as the ones in nearby parishes suggests that Suffolk struggled to adhere to new religious and spiritual mandates in places.

The struggles parishes and communities experienced to change over to a new format of worship cannot be understated. Over the course of the different Reformation and iconoclastic movements, the ways parishioners interacted with and experienced their churches changed substantially. Everything from the visual space to the way that the dead were interacted with and treated changed over the course of a century as Puritanism continued to grow in popularity and exert its influence through various monarchs. There were still remnants of banned religious images throughout the English Civil War, which began in 1642 and ended in 1651, and in some cases churches kept substantial amounts of these images, such as the nearby parish of Clare, which had several representations of God the Father, Christ, the Holy Ghost, the Holy Lamb, and apostles throughout the building (Cooper and Ecclesiological Society 2001). The presence of these images, particularly in this region of Suffolk, was recorded by William Dowsing as he travelled throughout East Anglia, zealously carrying out iconoclastic orders against fonts, crosses, stained glass, and other surviving images (Cooper and Ecclesiological Society 2001). The survival of these images suggests that not all churches complied with every order during the Reformation and that perhaps there were pockets throughout England that did not want to fully relinquish

the "old faith". In the late 1640s, Royalist uprisings occurred throughout England. In 1648, Bury St. Edmunds experienced a violent rising alongside Newmarket and Lidgate, which is featured in this study (Young 2015). Lidgate's uprising shows that there was Royalist sympathy, which was often connected to a less Puritan and more Catholic form of worship during the English Civil War. The extent of any Catholic or "popeish" influence is, again, impossible to fully determine, but Lidgate's participation in an attempt to overthrow Puritan rule shows that there was strong Royalist and anti-Puritan sentiment in the parish.

With the context of sequestrations and Royalist risings added to what is known about the drawings in Stradishall and Lidgate, it becomes more apparent that these drawings are likely the Virgin and Child. As many nearby parishes seem to have some sort of involvement with sequestrations or have the presence of images recorded during the much later iconoclastic movement of the 1640s, it is likely and probable that some parish members were more attached to images and saints than others. Many churches, in fact, hid various instruments of the mass as well as images in an attempt to preserve their old ways of worship (Aston 2016; Duffy 2005; Marshall 2012). Combining this information with the knowledge that wall paintings of the Virgin and Child were likely present in these parishes, it becomes clearer that these drawings may be attempting to mimic or replace these formal artworks that have been lost or destroyed. While some churches tried to resist the Reformation and iconoclastic movements through concealment, perhaps some used graffiti as a different way to prevent these changes. This is especially obvious at Stradishall, where the drawing, though crude, is in the chancel arch, which would have had more limited access during the medieval era but would also have more likely had statues or paintings of Mary nearby to be close to the altar and therefore imbue them with holiness (Duffy 2005; Marks 2004). The large drawing may be an attempt to restore these lost images and objects in the space where they were originally located. The drawings at Lidgate, while fainter and apparently more hidden, could possibly be near another small altar or in place of a statue that was removed in that area of the church. While not all graffiti are related to the Reformation or are indeed expressing resistance to these changes in religion and worship over time, a closer study of these inscriptions may help interpret parish-level responses to iconoclasm. As two possible drawings of Mary appear to have been created in two parishes in the same hundred of Suffolk, this suggests that graffiti were used in this area not only for social communication but also potentially as a way to reclaim older forms of worship and interaction with the church space.

4. Recording Methods of This Study

To find and record these images, a raking light technique was used to identify lines in the stone, and then the images were photographed. The image at St. Margaret Stradishall was recorded using photogrammetry techniques and processed using 3D Zephyr. There are more than 700 pieces of graffiti between these buildings that have been recorded and catalogued. It should be noted that other graffiti in these churches do not appear to correspond to or relate to the two drawings discussed here. There are other drawings of figures in Lidgate—one is a small drawing of a woman with her hands on her hips, there is a profile drawing of a man's face with a hat, and another is a rectangle with a humanoid head with rabbit ears. Stradishall has one small drawing of a person, though gender and clothing are not discernible due to its crude execution. Both churches have graffiti drawings of animals as well as pieces of writing and sets of initials. The graffiti do not appear to directly relate to each other; however, it is difficult to gauge their influence on each other as in some areas of the churches there are large collections of graffiti in clusters. Each church had its publicly accessible spaces fully surveyed using this method, so complete data sets for the nave, chancel, and ground-level tower space have been created for further study and investigation.

The dating of graffiti is a challenging issue to address. Dating graffiti precisely if a date is not given in the inscription can be difficult to impossible as there is often no date associated with drawings in particular. While clothing may be useful to try and date a

drawing, Gilchrist observes that in art sometimes older styles of clothing will appear in drawings rather than contemporary ones, which makes clothing less precise as a dating method, and this issue is repeated with regards to ship graffiti. However, if the inscription is written, writing styles may help discern when an inscription was made if a date is not provided (Champion 2015; Dhoop et al. 2016; Gilchrist 2018; Jones-Baker 1993). Previously, Pritchard thought that most graffiti seemed to date from the twelfth century to the sixteenth; however, more recent work has shown that most graffiti, at least in the Risbridge Hundred of East Anglia, is from the early modern period based on the letter forms that are present (Alexander n.d.; Hollis 2024; Pritchard 1967). With this information, it can be supposed that some of the undated drawings in the churches discussed in this article may be from the early modern era or post Reformation rather than medieval or pre-Reformation. Other religious images do occur in this region that may be from the same time period, such as a drawing of Christ in Stoke by Clare, which can be seen in Figure 5, where he is depicted as a bearded figure with a halo that contains a cross in it. In the figure shown, there is the bottom of another unidentifiable face. This drawing of Christ is also located within a chancel space on a pier at Stoke by Clare, possibly replacing another previous image of Christ as well.

Figure 5. A drawing of what appears to be Christ with a halo containing a cross. There is another face above the halo, but it is not identifiable. This shows that other religious images do occur in graffiti occasionally.

5. Conclusions

While these are only two drawings out of more than 700 shared between both churches mentioned in this study, it is significant that they were created. While other graffiti in the church often appears to have a more social or secular meaning, these two drawings are possibly evidence of an attempt to preserve religious practices that were under persecution. As both of these churches have documentary evidence of Catholic associations (or at least "less Puritan" ones) up through the seventeenth century, the drawings of Mary and the Child were likely created to preserve the religious practices that were prevalent prior to the Reformation. This kind of tangible evidence of resistance to these movements is rare and often does not survive in archaeology this clearly.

The presence of these two drawings also shows the relationship between the parish and the church building and how after iconoclastic movements the parish still experienced a type of “ownership” over the church space. These possible attempts to add the iconography of the Virgin and Child back into the church’s visual landscape demonstrate that not all parishioners were content with the religious changes being made—though perhaps the discontent is more obvious in Stradishall, where the drawings are deeply etched into the stonework in a more prominent space in the building than at Lidgate. Both attempts to draw and revive an older way of worship align with the local history and presence of Royalists and other “popeish” images in the region.

Despite the newness of research into historic graffiti and their meanings and interpretation, these two inscriptions show how useful graffiti can be when establishing parish histories and when observing the impact of nationwide religious movements. The creation and survival of these drawings suggest that these parishes may have resisted the Reformation movements and fought iconoclasm in their own way—by adding informal images back into the church space. While documentary evidence does show these areas as likely resisting the Reformation, the added material aspect of graffiti solidifies these notions and tangibly demonstrates the complexity of the impact of these movements on parishes. While graffiti on its own is not necessarily able to answer questions about the parishioners of the past and the engagement they had with their buildings, the combination of graffiti and documentary evidence can provide a more in depth and nuanced view of how parishes functioned and attempted to resist change and loss after the Reformation.

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