

## **SEPTEMBER 2015 MONTHLY MEETING**

Peter Westmacott, deputising for Peter Shannon, welcomed 117 members and guests to the September monthly meeting held at Hungate Church. This was our second and final meeting at the church, a venue that many members have grown to value for its space and comfort. Next month we should be back at the Public Hall, providing the building programme is completed on time. The vice-chairman asked for extra people to offer themselves for the tea rota. By the end of the meeting four new people had stepped forward to help. Well done! Group membership now stands at 366, which is just slightly below the national average of 375. The rapid uptake in membership since our foundation in October has been phenomenal, and the committee has been delighted with this level of interest, confidence and commitment. Peter introduced Mu Gurbutt, our new Programme Secretary, and she, in turn, welcomed and introduced our guest speaker, Pat May, who spoke knowledgeably about the fascinating subject of Mediaeval Graffiti found inside our local churches (see report below). After her talk Pat answered questions from the floor and Mu rounded off with the vote of thanks. The meeting closed at 11.30 a.m.

## **MEDIEVAL GRAFFITI**

Patricia May of Waveney Valley Community Archaeology gave us a most enlightening talk on medieval graffiti. "Medieval graffiti" refers to the plethora of symbols, pictures and words found engraved on the interiors of churches in the British Isles, seemingly made by the parishioners who worshipped there in the Middle Ages. Pat showed how she used an LED torch to illuminate the graffiti before photographing. This had the effect of making the marks appear to be raised rather than engraved, a help in analysis and interpretation.

Masons often left their mark on the buildings they constructed using simple graphics such as the ones which can be found at Norwich Cathedral. Wealthy people who could afford tombstones had them engraved with their name believing that the closer they were to the church the closer they were to God.

The most common categories are: curvilinear designs drawn with a compass, ships, double 'v' symbols thought to possibly refer to the Virgin Mary, crosses in a variety of styles and configurations, Solomon's knots, mason's marks, merchant's marks, heraldic crests and pentangles.

Daisy wheel circles (apotropaious) were compass-drawn circles with petals and were also known as demon traps. The design was constructed so that once the demons entered they could not escape and went round in never ending circles.

Patricia explained how most engravings are found up to a height of 5ft 6in, the average height of a male in medieval times.

Covehithe Church in particular had an unusual engraving in the form of a gauntlet and several churches feature ships as a prayer to God asking for a safe voyage.

One of Pat's best discoveries was the signature of John Lydgate, a contemporary of Chaucer's son, in Lidgate church - see below, or follow the link to this BBC news report.

Patricia was extremely knowledgeable and enthusiastic and I am sure we will all now look out for these markings when we visit churches. (Vicki John)

