

DRAGON HALL WITCHMARKS



These marks which are called apotropaic or ritual protection marks occur too frequently to be merely meaningless graffiti. They remind us that in previous centuries, in a pre-scientific age, people lived in fear of evil spirits, of demons, or of being cursed by witches. They could steal your soul and consign it to eternal damnation. Witches were hard to detect because they could change shape: into a cat or dog, a bat or a toad and creep into the home to lie in wait for you. To protect themselves people painted, scratched and burnt symbols on all the possible points of entry into the house: the windows, the doors, and particularly, the fireplaces. Dragon Hall – which of course was a residential building from the late 15th century onwards - has over 50 of these. You can see some on the wall posts in the South Hall, and a daisy wheel in the South Hall, near the window facing the street.



Daisy wheel in South Hall

In the Great Hall itself there are some 40 witchmarks which relates to the number of individual domestic dwellings created by the partitioning of the Hall from the 15th century onwards.

How do you distinguish them from other graffiti such as mason's or carpenter's marks? Look for repetitive circles; scorch marks like teardrops or a candle flame or a petal daisy wheel design. These shapes had symbolic powers. The v for the Virgin or m for Mary is often seen. The Virgin Mary was looked to for protection. Look too for the shape of the cross or repeated X's and what looks like a lollipop on a stick.



Witchmarks above fireplace in Coetzee Room (Display Rm.2)

These can be found frequently throughout East Anglia where in the C17th century fear of witches was rife and where many witches were hanged, notably during the campaigns of Matthew Hopkins, so-called 'Witchfinder General' in 1644 – 46.

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