St Mary the Virgin Church, Weston on Trent

you don't have to travel far

to find historic churches such as St Mary

the virgin here at Weston on Trent

it's easy to just drive past but i love

walking around them

they have wonderful architecture

gargoyles designed to take water away

from the buildings

grotesques some funny some rude and some

just scary I’ve invited along Alison

Fern an

archaeologist and researcher in

protective markings

to talk to us about two other things

that can be found

symbolism on gravestones and historic

graffiti

so Alison what can you tell me about

this lovely church

this is a wonderful church that's

dedicated to St Mary the virgin

the majority of the church was built in the

13th century

although the chancel probably dates from

the 12th century

and there's a little bit that's a little

bit older but in general we're

seeing a 12th century church

inside there's some really interesting

features there's a tomb

uh which has some really nice memento

mori which is a skull and crossbones

and a figure of death

and these are really common motifs that

look really bizarre to us today but

really

but just emphasize the fragility of life

there's also

there's a font which dates to about the

middle of the 17th century

I’ve noticed that there are lots of

letters and symbols engraved on the

walls inside this porch

and i know that you're probably the best

person i could be asking to come and

have a look

and explain what they might be and what

they were probably used for do you want

to come and have a look yes I’d love to

I can see um sort of an m shape there

what does that mean we've got two of

these in the porch way there's one

just here this shape here is that is

then known as a double m

and they're commonly associated with the

virgin Mary

and as this church is dedicated to St

Mary the virgin it makes perfect sense

to find them here

they're also found in domestic buildings

and homes as well

but they are heavily associated with the

culture of the virgin

and they're just really nice marks to

find we also get another form

which is the other way around so you get

what's we call a conjoined v

they're also a symbol of the virgin and

stands not surprisingly for

Virgo virgin and virgin of virgins the m

we think stands for

mother of mercies or in latin that's

mate and misericordiai

and they're just a beautiful thing to

find and nice that we've got them in

this porch as well

i can see some hands there and they are

my favourite symbols

do you know any more about those they're

one of the symbols that actually we

think a little bit enigmatic we don't

know

why people made them but they're quite

common again in churches and also we get

footprints as well although there aren't

any footprints here

the particularly nice thing about these

ones is one looks like a little child's

handprint because it's tiny

and the one above it is adult size

yeah it looks like a glove doesn't it

almost

the other things that we have on here as

well we've got quite a lot of name and

date

graffiti so as you'd probably expect

there's a nice one just up here

and there's one further along on the

beam just here

where the name has been put inside a

cartouche I’ve had a little look as well

and i think the earliest date that we

can find is one right at the top here

which says 1648.

i noticed there's um it looks like a

figure up there and

you can't really see it very well in

this light but it's sometimes better

isn't it if people wanted to look for

them if they bought a torch

yes just a cheap led torch will show you

most the graffiti that you need to find

this one doesn't show up that well even

with a torch but I’ve

had a little look at it and what it

seems to be is a female figure

and with you can see the shape of her

costume and her arms coming around

so she's actually a really nice find in

here

i can see as well something that looks a

bit hidden in the plaster there

like a circle

this one here daisy wheels are often

referred to

or compass drawn circles and they're

normally a circle that's subdivided

into many petals and this appears to be

on older plaster as it's hidden behind

some of this

fronting plaster here and i suspect that

given this is a porch way and

is much newer than the original church

then what we might have here is a

consecration cross

because it looks as though you could fit

four petals inside that circle

which would be absolutely fitting with a

consecration cross

and it will say that this port had also

been dedicated to god as part of the

architecture

I’ve noticed that some gravestones have

Not just the names of who they're

dedicated to but lots of symbolism on

them

can you explain what that might mean and

what people could look for

yeah sure we'll go across and have a

look at some of the ones that we find

here in the churchyard

great

this little slate gravestone's rather

nice it's got two

skulls these are two lovely motifs that

are quite common in 18th century graves

they're known as memento mori and you

can see they're two

quite cheerful little skulls they're

scribed on a local slate i think and

also we've got

two pillars that are beautifully carved

here these often symbolize the head of

the household

or somebody who'd been quite important

in life also

on either side there are two lovely

floral motifs

they look a bit like forget-me-nots but

I’m not sure entirely what they are

this is a beautifully carved gravestone

and again there's some common

motifs on here this one is the acanthus

leaf

which symbolized a rough journey through

life and difficulties

but also gave hope that there will be

eternal life and immortality

and it's a similar motif to this

beautifully carved

hourglass shape here and this basically

just represents how short life is

and how transient it is i don't know if

you can see but just around here

circling it

is what's called anoraboros which is a

snake

swallowing its own tail and again it's

another one of these symbols that

represents immortality

so next time you see an old church why

not stop and have a look what you can

find

maybe you could make it a treasure hunt

for your children