

The Writings on The Wall - historical graffiti found at Hall I' th' Wood.

Today we think of graffiti as being a disrespectful act of vandalism, but graffiti basically means 'writing on a wall', and in the medieval period this was viewed very differently. The Medieval Graffiti project was originally set up in the south of England and primarily focused on apotropaic marks (protecting against evil) found in churches, but it quickly became obvious that other medieval buildings displayed similar marks. The project was soon taken up by local groups across the country, including here in the North West.



Hall I' th' Wood, Bolton

Bolton Museums has the privilege of caring for two medieval buildings. Hall I' th' Wood has a range of medieval protective markings dating from around 1560 to around 1630 which have recently been surveyed by Bolton Archaeology and Egyptology Society. The majority of the graffiti is found in the upper floors, particularly the attic, which escaped the attentions of Victorian renovators under the direction of Lord Leverhulme. In this part of the building the workmen did not strip away the historical stories left on the wooden beams of the building.

Although the aim of the survey was to locate and record medieval markings, other more modern graffiti was found around the building. Most of this modern graffiti is in the attic, where Leverhulme's workmen probably thought no one would see it. Many

initials of 'J.B.' and 'J.R.' some with dates of 1900-1901 can be clearly seen carved into the structural timbers. 1900-1901 was the period of the conversion of Hall I' th' Wood, from a farmhouse to a museum.



Hall I' th' Wood attic space

The most interesting of these modern graffiti marks can be found on the attic corridor, etched into the top of an arched wooden doorway reads 'Tom Whitty 1901'. It is the only full name in graffiti anywhere in the hall and the inclusion of the date allows us to investigate the graffiti's creator.



Who was Thomas Whitty? The 1901 census was used to find him.

31 Sutcliffe St, Bolton

John Whitty aged 53 Head Occupation Builders Labourer born Ireland

Julia Whitty aged 54 Wife born Ireland

Valentine Whitty aged 30 Son Occupation Railway Porter born Bolton

Thomas Whitty aged 28 Son Widower: Occupation Builders Labourer born Bolton

Alice Whitty aged 24 Dau Occupation Cotton Ring Spinner born Bolton

Margaret Whitty aged 20 Dau Occupation Cotton Weaver born Bolton

Hannah Whitty aged 1 Dau born Bolton

From the 1901 census entry it was discovered Thomas was already a widower at the relatively young age of 28. Curious to find out what had happened to his young wife, research was carried out to find his marriage.

According to the census, Thomas had been born in Bolton in 1872. His parents John and Julia (née Prendergast) were both from Kilkenny in Ireland and married in Bolton in 1869. Searching back from the census date of 1901, only one marriage was found for a Thomas Whitty in Bolton and this was to a Hannah Foole in 1899.

Marriage: 17 May 1899 Holy Trinity, Bolton, Lancashire, England

Thomas Whitty - 27, Labourer, Bachelor, 5 Rix Street
Hannah Foole - 32, Dress Maker, Spinster, 143 Bridgeman Street
Groom's Father: John Whitty, Labourer
Bride's Father: Roger Foole, Wheelwright
Witness: Percy Rothwell; Annie Timms

Sadly, Hannah died in Sharples in February 1900, less than 12 months after their marriage. She was aged 32 and died possibly in childbirth or shortly after from complications and was buried at Astley Bridge Cemetery on 28 Feb 1900. Hannah Foole Whitty, the child to which she gave birth, was born on 23 February 1900 in Sharples.

In the 1901 census Hannah is listed last and shown over the page on the census return at 31 Sutcliffe St. Oddly she is listed as a daughter of John Whitty by mistake, rather than granddaughter.

In 1911 Hannah is living with her uncle Valentine and her father Thomas, who was by then a labourer for Bolton Corporation Street Department. They were still at 31 Sutcliffe St, the family home. Hannah is shown as a "relative" to Valentine, who was head of the household and her father Thomas was shown as brother to Valentine.

Hannah eventually married in 1933 and had two children. Her family was still living with her father at 31 Sutcliffe St when war broke out in 1939. Thomas Whitty died in Bolton in April 1957 aged 84.

In 1902 Hall I' th' Wood opened to the public. Lord Leverhulme had purchased the hall in 1899 and subsequently gave it to Bolton Corporation.

The project has found that modern graffiti, much like its medieval counterpart, usually isn't random and is often linked to times of change or upheaval. It is highly likely given Tom's profession that he was at Hall I' th' Wood working for Bolton Corporation or Lord Leverhulme as part of the renovation team to turn the building into a functioning museum. This in itself would have been a momentous enough occasion for Bolton, especially given the public acclaim which accompanied the donation of Hall I' th' Wood by Leverhulme.

Tom's own personal turmoil might also have made it a more poignant time for him too. The upper attic spaces were never intended to be seen by the public, and so the

workmen, like Tom, probably thought that few people, if any would ever see their graffiti.