

## East Kirk of St Nicholas dig - week 10 - 3rd to 7th April, 2006

**07 April 2006 11:10**

Judith Stones, Keeper of Archaeology, writes...

First of all, here's a brief update from Chris Croly to his report last week:

"Emma Fentiman has now completed her research in newspapers on the 1874 fire at St Nicholas. You'll remember that she was trying to establish how much of the church was damaged.

"Emma has found that the fire started around 8pm on 9 October 1874. The steeple and tower were engulfed in flames: by 9.30pm the lead covering the framework of the tower began to run and at 9.55pm the framework fell into the East Church.

"The resulting damage to the interior was extensive, but the walls suffered negligible damage with the loss of only a few stones from the top of the north wall. The Weekly Free Press noted that the walls were 'stripped entirely bare of plaster and lathing, while the effects of the intense heat are visible on the...charred stones...!'.  
"

"Thus the church was not entirely rebuilt in 1875. The older walls did survive and the present East Church is a mixture of Archibald Simpson's 1837 walls and the 1875 interior and roof. This at least explains the marks of burning that we found on the walls during the excavations."

And the answer to the riddle from Andrew Melville's 17th-century Commonplace Book is 'MYSELF'.

There's been a lot of progress on the site over the last couple of weeks, with parts of the area beginning to look deeply excavated.

The team is being boosted over the holiday period by a number of volunteers, including several school pupils, keen to learn more about archaeology by working alongside the experts.

They include our youngest-ever volunteer, Emma Robertson (aged 9), who has wanted to be an archaeologist for as long as she can remember, and brought her dad Anton along to work too. They are pictured below.



We've also been joined by Katrina Campbell, who is Acting Deputy Head at Elrick School.

Katrina is an archaeology graduate from Glasgow University who worked with the City Council Archaeology Unit on excavations in Castlegate and at the Carmelite Friary in the Green. She also helped with our 'Step into Medieval Aberdeen' schools project before training as a teacher.

Working on the dig during her Easter holidays is therapeutic, she says!

Katrina is pictured below carefully excavating a skeleton which has its hands clasped together, under the chin, holding something - but what? Could it be something like a rosary,

perhaps? We'll know by next week.



Neil Paterson, retired Head of Physics at Bankhead Academy, is working on his first dig at St Nicholas.

In the photo we can see him uncovering and cleaning a skeleton that we can certainly say is of medieval date. It's been damaged by the foundations of the stone 'raft' which supported the pillars of the 15th century choir - so must be earlier than that period.

We're certainly heading back in time.



At the bottom of another of the 'engineering pits', which will hold beams to support the East Kirk Gallery, a very large, deep and symmetrically made hole has been found cut into the subsoil.

We'd like to think that it once held a big wooden post - some part of a wooden building, even a church, perhaps, in the 12th century, or earlier?

Malachy is demonstrating the practical difficulties of cleaning out the bottom of this post-pit to make it ready for photography!



\* The next installment of Judith's diary will be posted after the Easter holidays.

\* Anyone planning to visit the ongoing archaeological dig at the Kirk of St Nicholas over Easter is being reminded that there will be no tours on Monday, April 10, as well as Good Friday and Easter Monday, but the free tours will resume after the holidays.