

Weekly update on progress at archaeological excavation

Judith Stones, Aberdeen City Council's Keeper of Archaeology, reports on the week's progress at the East Kirk of St Nicholas excavation, and looks ahead to tomorrow's Open Day at the dig.

East Kirk of St Nicholas dig, June 5 to 9 – Week 19

Judith Stones, Keeper of Archaeology, writes...

Tomorrow (Saturday, June 10) will be an open day at the dig.

The church will be open from 10am to 4pm and there will be tours of the West and East Kirks and guided visits to the dig, from the East Kirk Gallery at 10.30am, 11.30am, 1.30pm and 2.30pm.

We're looking forward to seeing you there. There's been a lot of progress since the last open day in May, with plenty of new discoveries and theories to discuss with the team!

If you can't manage tomorrow, then we'd love to see you on one of our regular weekday tours on Mondays and Fridays at 1.30pm.

On Mondays there's a guided tour of the West Kirk and a visit to the excavation, lasting about an hour, and on Fridays a visit to the excavation led by a member of the archaeology team.

The first photo this week shows something which may turn out to be of great interest.



Several similar deposits of slightly spongy material has been found within some of the skulls during careful excavation – and we're wondering whether they might be the remains of brain tissue.

We're awaiting an expert opinion, although some of the archaeologists working on the site have come across this kind of substance before and suspect that that's what it is. I hope to be able to tell you more at a later date.

The next photo also shows something that's not easy to interpret. When this stone first appeared, the letters 'CR' at the top made us wonder whether it might be a march stone.



Those two letters, standing for 'City Royalty', still appear on a number of stones which mark the boundary of the inner marches – formerly the area of crofts belonging to the Royal Burgh of Aberdeen.

We know that the boundaries have been delineated by stones since at least the 16th century. However, although the 'A' could signify 'Aberdeen', the remainder of the inscription makes little sense in march stone terms. It's more likely to be a gravestone, but even then it's a bit unintelligible!

A couple of weeks ago I stressed the importance of the work of the photographers, Sandra and Helen, in recording every feature and find in minute detail as the dig progresses.

This week they've had some valuable help from Rachel Dixon, a pupil at Bridge of Don Academy, who chose to come and do photography for her week's work experience.

Rachel, who goes into 4th year on Tuesday, is interested in photography and art and particularly likes using computers to adapt and improve photos. Those techniques can be valuable sometimes in archaeological work, of course, where, for example, lighting conditions aren't always ideal.



This week the lengthy process has begun of carefully removing the massive sleeper walls which supported the superstructure of the east end of the 15th century church.

Meanwhile, burials are still being excavated. One adult individual uncovered this week suffered from Legg-Calve-Perthes disease, where interruption of the blood supply to the femur, probably as the result of trauma or fracture in childhood, has resulted in a mushroom-shaped development of bone and eventual osteoarthritis in the hip joint.



I believe, from a small amount of 'background reading', that this is a disease to which miniature and toy breeds of dogs are also susceptible!