

East Kirk of St Nicholas - Week 7 - 13 to 17 March 2006

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The weekly diary has transferred to the news section for the next few weeks.

This week, Judith Stones, Keeper of Archaeology, writes...

At the end of last week a window was installed at ground floor level within the church, which gives a new perspective on the dig (pictured below), in addition to the superb high-level view from the East Kirk gallery.



There's also now a regular display of objects from the site, which can be seen within Drum's Aisle.

Some objects, of course, are too fragile to go on show at once and have to go straight to the conservation lab at Marischal Museum to be stabilised - and even then will only be suitable for display within a museum environment.

Excavated ironwork, for example, has to be stored and displayed at a constant relative humidity of only 10%.

The objects from the dig now number several thousand.

Traditionally on archaeological excavations, significant portable objects are known as 'small finds', and the precise position where they were found is recorded both horizontally and vertically.

Most of these objects are genuinely small in size, but, paradoxically, 'small' finds can also be quite large!

Hazel MacFarlane (pictured below), an archaeology student at the University of Aberdeen, has been cataloguing some of the many pieces of moulded stone which the excavation has produced.

Some of these stones probably formed part of the structure of the 15th-century church and were later re-used in the foundations of the 19th-century one.

Some may be even older - from a 12th-century church, perhaps - and it may be possible to tell that from the shape and character of the mouldings.



And another intriguing mason's mark has turned up this week (pictured) on a piece of broken sandstone. It will be on display next week at the Church.



There's a very old archaeological joke: "One stone is a stone, two are a feature, three are a wall".

In this case we've only found one stone, so we're not getting too excited, but it is possible that a fine piece of dressed Morayshire sandstone (pictured below) which emerged quite low down during the final cleaning of one of the 'engineering' holes this week may be related in some way to an early church east end.



Is a 12th-century St Nicholas Church beginning to appear, we wonder?

Dr Paul Duffy, Specialist Project Officer (Human Remains and Forensics) at Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division, made his second visit this week. He will be undertaking the analysis of the human remains once the dig is over and is keeping in regular touch with the work on site.

He confirmed a potential case of venereal syphilis in the teenage male whose skeleton was excavated in week 5 (pictured below) and identified osteomyelitis, or infection of the bone, in both arms of a young child.



In some cases, where the wooden coffins have been well-sealed and deeply buried, bones have not survived well, but other remains have, including burial clothing. In the photo you can see evidence of a silk cuff beside the hand.



The site tours are still proving popular, but if you haven't been on one yet and are free at 1.30pm on a Friday or Monday, do join us.

Please see the initial 'Excavation at St Nicholas Church' web-page for details and remember that over the Easter period there are some days when the tours will not be on because of special services at this high point in the church's year.