

The latest installment of the St Nicholas Diary - week 9, March 27-31

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As Judith Stones is currently on holiday, this week Chris Croly, Assistant Keeper (Research) takes the opportunity to discuss the on going historical research associated with the excavation.

There are several strands to this research: you may recall that Kimm Curran has been working on the late 16th century volumes of the Kirk and Bridge Work Accounts.

However, research is also being conducted on the consequences of the disastrous fire of 1874. In that year a fire broke out in the medieval tower of the church. The fire destroyed the tower as well as Archibald Simpson's 1837 East Church.

Emma Fentiman and Sarah Woodward are both honours year students, reading for degrees in history at the University of Aberdeen, and are on work placement with the Archaeological Unit.

Sarah is engaged in research in the City Archives looking at events after the fire while Emma is going through the relevant newspapers of the day to see how the events were reported.

Traditionally we are told that the rebuilding work after the fire involved a complete rebuild of the East Church.

However, during the course of the investigation this supposition has been questioned: parts of the walls of the existing building, which have been uncovered, feature large scorch marks and seem to be remnants of the 1874 fire, suggesting that the church was not entirely rebuilt.

It will be very interesting to see exactly what the accounts for rebuilding (both in the archives and the newspaper articles) reveal.

A few weeks ago, two very interesting gravestones were found (pictured).



One was to the memory of Alexander Paterson, Younger son to Alexander Paterson Armourer, died 2 December 1679. Early indications are that they are a family of quite successful armourers and we might be able to get more on them.

The second was to Andrew Melville, a doctor of and later master of the Song School in Aberdeen, who died in 1640. Song schools had evolved out of the need for singing in the choral services and sung parts of the mass. The earliest evidence of the 'sang' school, as it was sometimes known, in Aberdeen dates to 1256.



Andrew Melville (sometimes spelled Melving) was appointed as a doctor of the school in 1617. He was admitted as a burgess of Aberdeen on 19 September 1621 and married the daughter of the then master of the Song School.

On the death of his father in law, in 1636, he applied to the council to be considered for the post of master. The council noted that he had given them 'sufficient pruiff of his qualificatioun in the airt of musick...' and he was duly admitted as master a position that he held for the next four years until his death in 1640.

An interesting relic has come down to us from Melville in the shape of his commonplace book.

The original of this is held in Special Collections, the archives for the University of Aberdeen. A selection of entries from it was published in 1899, edited by William Walker as *Extracts from the Commonplace Book of Andrew Melville*.

Within it he recorded the dates of birth of his children, listed books he owned, recorded ballads, poems and proverbs. Amongst the proverbs he recorded as no doubt current in

Aberdeen in the late 16th and early 17th-century seem surprisingly modern, such as: 'He hes put his nose out of joynt.' As well as 'Ye knaw on what syd yor bread is butterit.'

Others are very much of their time: 'Ill company brings a man to the gallows.'

He also included a riddle, which can be seen below. Log on next week for the answer!

A RIDELL.

The moir I seik the less I find
The less I find, the moir I get
The less I get, the moir behind
The moir behind, the grytter det
The grytter dett, ye less I cair
The less I care, ye moir I spair
The moir I spair, ye moir I spend
Resolūe this question now my freind
And lest yi witt yairof micht miss
My selff will tell ye qt it is
Loe now ye same to ye is tald
Doe then my alligor Unfold.