

Cromarty East Church Newsletter

Issue 5: Autumn 2009 Edited by Caroline Vawdrey



Tom Hillocks and David Alston discuss paint colour

Hay inside the church

and west lofts, found that Georgian grey paint had been used on these at a similar time period, and so this will be the colour used.



Graffiti, and yellow ochre paint

The north loft front is a different matter, and Tom reckons that this would have always been different to the other two. There's no evidence of grey, but there are tantalising glimpses of a scarlet and gold decorated background to the pew holders initials. This loft front will undergo

further conservation work to remove the early twentieth century pine effect finish and reveal the decorative work.

Precisely when the church can be repainted will be determined by the rate at which the plasterwork dries. This is a slow process, so it may be that the church re-opens minus its golden glow – but we'll keep you up-to-date with plaster drying progress.

Well, it makes a change from watching paint dry!



Victoria ponders paint colour

It has been agreed, hay will be on show inside the East Church, but this isn't some strange idea about interior design, it is the result of hours of debate and investigation.

Two of the principal players in the debate have been paint expert, Tom Hillocks and historian David Alston, whose combined knowledge led the team to conclude that yellow ochre decorated interior of the church after its major re-design in 1799 and that Farrow & Ball's 'Hay' is the near perfect match for this.

Investigation of the church woodwork, including the wooden fronts of the east

The left hand stripe is the colour that will be used to limewash the exterior of the church

Leaving their mark

When a stonemason carved this 'G' he would have little realised the debate it was going to cause in future.

Normally hidden from sight, the masons mark was revealed when the lintel of one of the windows in the south wall had to be replaced. As Denis Forrest from LDN Architects commented, "The carving caused much excited speculation – is the mark in its original position or has the stone been re-used from elsewhere? We haven't any definite answers, but it is certainly intriguing to ponder."

And just why were marks used? Well, there is some dispute, but the most generally accepted theory is that the Medieval 'bankers marks' are to show which stones you had worked, in order to get paid for that work.



But the East Church 'G' may fall into a later category of marks in use during the sixteenth and seventeenth century. These are thought to have been inscribed by the mason to publicise his pride in his skills.

Denis Forrest noted, "The most recent masons marks seen by our conservation advisor, Andrew Wright, date from 1783 and were found on the inside facings of the window rybats (stone edgings) in the Gaelic Chapel, Cromarty. So, if this East Church 'G' is an original stone in its original position then it is perhaps one of the latest marks carved."

Meet . . .



the architects

Law & Dunbar-Nasmith, or LDN Architects as they were snappily retitled, have been involved with the

conservation project at the East Church from the start. Andrew Wright, conservation advisor to SRCT, but previously with LDN, was first involved in the 1980s and then played a part in the 1997 discussions that led to the formation both of the Trust and of the East Church conservation project.

It's been a long road travelled for LDN since then; working out the precise requirements for the work to be done, being part of the team effort to raise funding support for the work, and now overseeing the project as it takes place.

Denis Forrest is in charge of that process on site, and inevitably he's had a few difficult decisions along the way. One such was reaching the conclusion that a concrete raft biscuit would be the best way to protect the archaeological evidence inside the church ... and then there was the discovery that in spite of close study before work began, that most of the church's roof slates weren't in a fit condition to be re-used...

But all of this Denis takes in his stride, often with a wry smile and the offer of a buttery to keep people thinking positive.

Travelling archaeology



John Wood and David Alston during early work on the site

The story of the East Church archaeological dig is being taken to the big city when John Wood of Highland Archaeology Services gives a lecture in

Inverness during the two day conference that marks the culmination of Highland Archaeology Fortnight.

John's talk will be on 17 October from 12.15 - 12.50 in the Spectrum Centre. Click on the banner on the front page of The Highland Council website - www.highland.gov.uk - to find out more about the amazing range of events they have organised for the festival.



Up in the loft

Over recent months the East Church has been two storey. The scaffolding was put up across the entirety of the church to allow access to the ceiling and coombs, creating a floor level that has seen much activity. Saving as much of the old plasterwork (2) as possible has been key to the work, and as the illustrations (1,2 and 4) show this has involved many miles of careful crack infilling and fastening back of the plaster. Where plasterwork was removed at the roof beam ends new lath was made up (3) and replastered in lime (sometimes filmed by young filmmaker Ronan Taylor (5)). Benny Malone (7) drew the short straw when he removed the plaster that covered the old sooty stove pipe hole, becoming soot covered himself. But the Laing Traditional Masonry team(6) reaped the reward for all their concentration and arm ache when their work was admired during the visit of the members and scholars from Society for the Protection Ancient Buildings.



To keep up-to-date with what's happening at the East Church

- ◆ Check out our website at www.eastchurchcromarty.co.uk
- Look for updates on our noticeboard at the church gate
- Contact the community and education officers - Caroline and David on 01381 600243 or by emailing info@eastchurchcromarty.co.uk

