



Cromarty East Church Newsletter

Issue 2: Winter 2008

Edited by Caroline Vawdrey



Foundation mysteries and wall revelations: work begins at the East Church



Highland Doors Open Day and the Heritage Lottery Half Billion celebration day on 20 September was busy at the church as people took the chance of a final look around before work got underway.

Site manager Andy Newcombe (pictured above) of Laing Traditional Masonry Ltd was on hand to tell visitors about what would be happening at the church. As might be expected some of Andy's work schedule has gone better than to plan, and some plans have been adapted.

To begin with drainage . . . a 'better than the plan story': efficient company (Allan W) Wilson); the ground very much drier than expected; signs of foundations drying as soon as they were revealed; work finished ahead of schedule.

As they worked many interesting building details emerged – and large dressed foundation stones found in the walls of the main aisle influenced future work and have remained mysteries. Speculation as to their purpose led to the possibility of a drainage culvert – and a decision to have an archaeological dig inside the church to investigate.

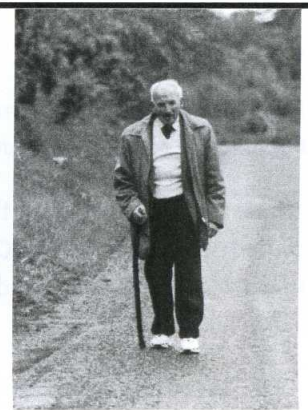
This was carried out by John Wood and Benny Malone (pictured below) of Highland Archaeology Services. No culvert was found – indeed the ground was surprisingly dry – but the archaeology was fascinating. There were surface finds of items dropped by the congregation and below this, a jumble of bones – put back in after the ground had been opened for new burials. In the lower layers of the dig there were articulated burials laid west to east, but even these are cut through to allow as many people as possible to be buried in the pre-Reformation Roman Catholic church.



It is moving to see the remains of a person who lived in Cromarty more than 500 years ago and to speculate on what life might have been like.

More bones have been found lying on the earthen surface at the east end of the aisle, and a small collapse of the soil suggests a coffin burial near to where a Catholic altar would have been. So pre-work speculation on Medieval origins seems to be confirmed.

All this hasn't stopped Laing's progress, and Andrew Burns (pictured below) has worked sometimes in a team – but very often alone with a range of Highland weather – to hammer and chisel off a phenomenal amount of harling. All the south side is now revealed (pictured in title) and Andrew is progressing determinedly around the other walls.



All those who knew Willie Hogg will be saddened to hear of his death at the age of eighty-five. Willie was a well kent figure around Cromarty as he walked around the town or along the shore with the aid of his stout and trusted walking stick; and with a pocket full of biscuits as a treat for any dog that he met.

Willie was a remarkable friend to The Scottish Redundant Churches Trust, and his daily opening and closing of the building for nigh on 15 years allowed many thousands of people to enjoy its calm beauty and take in its history.

We are sad that he will not see the fruits of all his efforts, but feel glad that he would have known that the church is now receiving the

photo by Sandy McCook: courtesy of Press & Journal

photos: Caroline Vawdrey

meet the ...*Archaeologists*



John Wood and Benny Malone of Cromarty based Highland Archaeology Services, have found themselves busier than expected, as work at the church has thrown up new questions and finds (see front page).

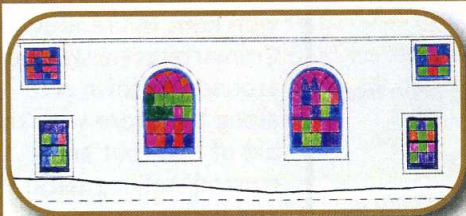
Often, professional archaeologists can check out a lot of development sites without finding much of interest, so working at the East Church has been a fascinating experience. As Benny Malone, who has been managing the day-to-day work on site, said:

"Being able to look at a building in this detail is a real privilege. It is fascinating not only to study the building fabric and try and work out some of the stages in the church's development, but also to look at the archaeology within the church."

John Wood has become similarly addicted to understanding the building's history, and commenting on the burials noted that:

"These show just how high the demand for a burial inside the church was prior to the 1560 Reformation, with burials cut through for new bodies, and with bones put back in a jumble after a new burial was made.

"Our work in the church seems to have confirmed its medieval origins, but some of the finds just below the surface can give a fascinating glimpse of the more recent community members who attended – from the George 3rd coin to a Boys Brigade button, thimble, 19th century wooden ice cream scoop and even a pair of spectacles."



Adding to the Archive

The east Church has a fascinating archive that includes poor relief

documents, marriage and death certificates and kirk session records. We're immensely grateful to Cromarty resident Nick Ray who has been scanning some of these documents for us. The first of these are available on the East Church website – together with a complete document list.

With the benefit of hindsight it is easy to see how fascinating this historic information is, but there will be many more recent memories and associations with the East Church which would be equally valuable. So we are asking anyone who would like to jot down their memories of the East Church, or who have photos or other memorabilia, to get in touch with Caroline or David.

Winter tour of church work

On **Saturday 13 Dec** David and Caroline will be giving 2 guided tours of the East Church so that visitors can take a look at what has been happening, and consider some of the

mysteries of the building's history. Tours will start at the church gates and will be at 11.00 and 13.30. Keep an eye on the website, noticeboard and newsletter for open days during 2009.

Looking after the Kirkyard

The Scottish Redundant Churches

Trust will be working with The Highland Council and local volunteers to work out the best way to look after the historic Kirkyard. Archaeology Scotland's 'Adopt a Monument' Officer Helen Bradley will be coming up to Cromarty on **2 March 2009** to tell volunteers about different

recording schemes and how to draw up a conservation plan. If you'd be interested in coming along, get in touch with either Caroline or David.

Looking after your Kirk

Concerned about how to look after your own Kirk? Member of a church fabric committee? This **FREE workshop on 24 March** looking at building maintenance – what to look out for, those little routine jobs that can save a major building headache – will be run by Roger Curtis of Historic Scotland. The workshop will run from 10.00 – 15.00 and will be based in the Cromarty Old Brewery training centre close to the church, with a tour of the church, lunch and refreshments all included. If you would like to find out more contact either Caroline or David.



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