

# *Islington* **Tribune**

Chip by chip, future of Highbury church's spire is carved out



Katherine Worthington restoring Darnley Mausoleum, Kent and below: at Highbury Christ Church



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**by JOE COOPER**

A CANONBURY woman playing a leading role in the restoration of the crumbling spire of Highbury Christ Church has spoken of the painstaking focus needed to repair the 170-year-old building.

Professional stone carver Katherine Worthington, 40, has been working for several months on a £300,000 project to repair the spire at Highbury Christ Church.

The wind and rain have taken their toll on the Bath stone spire, almost completely eroding gothic carvings at the church built in 1848.

It is the job of Ms Worthington, who works for conservation and restoration company DBR, to carefully cut out the damaged stones and make templates of them so new stones can be made as close to the original as possible. More than 260 stones are being replaced.

Chiselling away at stones requires a steady hand, patience and a lot of practice, said Ms Worthington, who has 20 years' experience in the trade.

"From very young I was making things with my dad in wood – he was an engineer," she said. "I would wake up wanting to make and construct new things.

"I am a perfectionist and very good at copying things. I was good at sports involving hand-eye coordination, playing county cricket at school. Stone carving encompasses all of these attributes. There's something very satisfying about chiselling natural stone. It's a great stress reliever with the rhythmic swing of the mallet."

Ms Worthington, who lives off Essex Road, has worked on some of Europe's most prestigious buildings and monuments, including York Minster, St Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, the Albert Memorial, and even on St Andrew's Cathedral in Sydney, Australia.

She pursued her hobby throughout her education, starting with wood carving and moving on to breeze blocks, plaster and eventually stone.

"It's something you're born with – you either have it or you don't," she added. "You need to have good hand-eye coordination, spatial awareness and patience. It can be very unforgiving but there is the creative side too. Stone is a beautiful material."

Apart from occasional use of hand-held power equipment, the tools of the trade – mallet and chisel – are the same that 12th century stone carvers would have used.

“I am also fascinated with history and historic buildings and feel very privileged to have restored so many of them up close and up high. It’s like stepping back in time when you climb up the scaffolding,” she said.

She is bringing her stone carving courses to St Mary’s Church in Upper Street next month. The sessions will take place on the first and third Saturday of the month, starting in October.

For more information, visit [www.katherineworthington.co.uk](http://www.katherineworthington.co.uk)