

6. CONCLUSIONS

While the evaluation was limited to a relatively small area of the Southern Courtyard of the Parliament House complex and therefore a tiny sample of the late medieval extension to St Giles' burial ground, it has provided a valuable insight into the lives (and deaths) of the inhabitants of the medieval city. This has been provided through study of evidence recovered from deposits within a largely undeveloped backland area in the centre of medieval Edinburgh and, in particular, through the analysis of the skeletal remains within the burial ground extension. This has illuminated the health and demography of the population of the city from the 15th to the mid-16th century.

The deep deposits underlying the St Giles' graveyard extension were rich in artefacts and ecofacts, which had survived in waterlogged, anaerobic conditions. The earliest of these deposits appeared to have developed gradually from the wash of material from activity on the High Street and

adjacent lanes. There followed a period, possibly in the early 15th century, when the evaluated area was covered by a yard or lane surface (occupied for a sufficient period for the cobble surface to be relaid). At that time, non-ecclesiastical activity such as trade, evidenced most clearly by the survival of a seal matrix, took place in the lands surrounding the church.

The relatively rapid build-up of deposits following this period may have been in part intentional. Material from upslope may have been used to build up the area, perhaps with the intention of extending the area available for the burial ground. Such large-scale landscaping would echo the 12th-century massive artificial clay platform identified beneath St Giles' in 1981 (Collard et al 2006: 67).

The study of the human remains from Parliament House, while providing only a small sub-sample of the population of the late medieval city, indicates the relatively good health of the general population of Edinburgh between the mid-15th and mid-16th centuries (in spite of occasional outbreaks of the plague).