

## 6. DISCUSSION

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These excavations provided insight into the construction of the ‘rampart’, as soil deposits containing disturbed and broken, commingled human remains and fragments of animal bone were identified, with the remains of at least fourteen human individuals present. The mixed soil deposits were found to have been dumped, and were lying on top of an old ground surface that sloped down and away from the abbey to the east, with the remains of a drystone wall, possibly a terrace wall, identified following the contour of the old ground surface. This wall may be an indication of spatial division, with clear midden material dating to the 15th century deposited behind and to the north-west of it, whilst the articulated, in situ human burials were found to the south-east of the wall. Unfortunately, the excavations into the midden material were very limited, and the ground to the north-west of the ‘rampart’ (and its previous use) was not possible to investigate archaeologically. Above the old ground surface, and probable boundary wall, the mixed soil with commingled human and animal remains had been dumped during the construction of the ‘rampart’, and effectively used to raise the ground level and create its flat surface still evident today. The discovery of the old ground surface, and associated drystone walls, suggested that land to the east of the abbey used to slope away, down toward the Jed Water located around 100m to the east.

Whilst the name of the structure and former military activity in the area have led to suggestions that the ‘rampart’ may date back to the 1500s, constructed by French troops, the archaeological evidence suggests that construction dates from a later period in history. The nature of the ‘rampart’ indicates that its construction occurred during one phase, with a rubble-backing wall immediately faced with the dressed stone face. This is a far more elaborate construction than would likely take place during a defensive military operation and suggests that the ‘rampart’ as we know it today is not the remains of defensive earthworks. The discovery of a 2d coin (SF28) dating to the latter part of Charles I’s reign (1642–1650) within the dumped soils and material used to construct the ‘rampart’ further corroborates

this and suggests that it was constructed sometime after the mid-17th century, whilst the radiocarbon dates from Individual ‘E’ provide a *terminus post quem* for ‘rampart’ construction ranging from the early 16th to the mid-17th century. The ‘rampart’ was likely completed prior to the end of the 18th century, when the Low Kirkyard was no longer depicted on town plans of Jedburgh. The abbey had fallen out of use by this time, and architectural fragments from the abbey had clearly been used in the construction of the ‘rampart’ backing wall. It is not infeasible however, that such a large-scale construction project could have removed evidence of earlier earthworks associated with 16th century military activity, but no traces of this were uncovered in the archaeological remains investigated.

### 6.1 Changing burial practices and treatment of the dead

Excavation through the old ground surface, and the sealed soft sandy silts below, at the southern end of the works revealed the articulated remains of two intact human burials, one male and one female, at a depth of almost two metres below the top level of the ‘rampart’. Body positioning of both skeletons (particularly orientation of the shoulder bones) suggest that they were likely shrouded at burial, and radiocarbon dating and the close proximity of the remains indicate that both individuals were interred at the same time. The only grave good retrieved was a small, unused fiddle-key horseshoe nail found clasped in the left hand of the male individual (Individual ‘B’), which was likely some sort of amulet. At the western end of the grave, beneath and adjacent to the head and shoulders of Individual ‘B’, the partial remains of three, yellow, cut sandstone blocks were identified, forming the eastern end of a stone-lined feature that continued beyond the grave cut (and limits of excavation) to the west. These stones did not align with the burial, however, the head was placed between two of the sandstone blocks, and the left shoulder was found partially resting on their northern edge. The style and orientation of the blocks suggests that the interment of these two individuals had disturbed the eastern end of an earlier cist grave. The disturbance of earlier graves was further emphasised by the identification of the distal ends of two femora and

three foot bones in the grave cut above the head of Individual 'A', suggesting that another earlier burial (Individual 'D') had been cut through during the interment of the two individuals observed here.

This earlier burial must have been cut through at the knees, and intriguingly, two extra tibiae (lower leg bones) were found within the grave fill of Individuals 'A' and 'B'. It is suspected that these tibiae belonged to Individual 'D'. If this is the case, the reburial of the tibiae alongside the lower legs of the male and female individuals shows some level of care and respect for earlier burials by the grave diggers; the same cannot be said however, of the people responsible for the construction of the 'rampart'. It is clear that the feet of both Individuals 'A' and 'B' were, at least partially, damaged or destroyed during 'rampart' construction. The feet of the male individual were partially crushed and obscured by the large foundation stones of the 'rampart', whilst the female individual lost both feet, and her lower legs were completely cut through above the ankles. This is a pattern of disturbance that was observed as the 'rampart' repair works progressed to the north. It became very apparent that the construction of the 'rampart' had disturbed several other graves, with two further burials identified as having been cut through during the primary construction of the 'rampart': One burial cut through in the abdominal region, and one burial cut through at the ankles. The primary construction of the 'rampart' likely cut through a portion of the earlier, 'Low Kirkyard', ultimately disturbing several burials, with the disturbed remains cast upwards with the dumped soils and used to raise the ground level and build the 'rampart' walkway.

Analysis of pottery fragments retrieved from the grave fill of Individuals 'A' and 'B' suggests that they came from vessels that likely date to the 12th century. Whilst we know that the two primary burials date to the mid-1400s, the pottery fragments potentially relate to earlier burials or activity in the area, and could have been disturbed during grave cutting; it is not possible to say that the pottery definitely came from the disturbed burial that was likely responsible for the extra tibiae, however, it may highlight the repeated use of the site for burials dating back to the 12th century and the founding of Jedburgh Abbey. It is also clear that the burials identified all happened prior to the construction of the 'rampart'.

This practice of disturbing earlier burials is common across England and Scotland in the later medieval period and often seems to have occurred even in monastic settings (McCarthy 1990). Graves were often intercut and the remains of the earlier burials were either re-interred with the new burial or became part of the commingled assemblage within the grave fills. When burials are disturbed, particularly in an Anglo-Christian setting, and not disturbed deliberately, it likely indicates that there was no visible grave marker present to denote a burial. The disturbance of the earlier burials by later interments at Jedburgh Abbey Rampart is a fairly typical representation of later medieval burial practices. What is unusual is the evidence for it being a double burial, as this is not a normal practice for this time period (Hindmarch & Melikian 2006). To gain insight into the lives of the two primary individuals excavated during these works, we must try to place them in their 15th century context.

## 6.2 Biocultural context for the Jedburgh Abbey Rampart skeletons

Radiocarbon dating of the two primary burials discussed here indicates that they were interred in the mid-1400s, long before the abbey fell out of use. Their burial location, quite near to the abbey itself, suggests that they may have been people of some prominence in the community; though they were not interred within the abbey and thus unlikely to be nobility or from the monastic order. Unfortunately, there have not been a large number of studies done on skeletal material from medieval Scotland, however, there was some analysis of the 41 burials excavated at Jedburgh Abbey in the 1980s which can provide some comparison for our 'rampart' individuals (Grove 1995: 117–30). The majority of the burials excavated from areas considered monastic (the Chapter House, outside the Chapter House, within the Cloister Alley, and within the Church) were likely male and the only pathologies detailed were dental or degenerative (ibid: 117–28). These make up the majority of the burials described in the publication. Fifteen other burials were considered post-monastic and contained males, females, and children, displaying a wider range of pathological lesions, including possible evidence of anaemia, though still primarily dental and degenerative

pathologies (ibid: 128–30). The two individuals from the ‘rampart’ are therefore notable for two reasons (in comparison to the those excavated in the 1980s); firstly, they fall into the monastic time period and include a female inhumation; and secondly, while they seem to follow the pattern of dental and degenerative pathologies observed, the male individual (‘B’) in particular, displays more extensive pathological changes which could be related to inherited traits (that is the bifurcated spinous processes of the cervical vertebrae and the transitional vertebra resulting in Bertolotti’s Syndrome).

If we look further to other bioarchaeological studies of medieval populations in Scotland, Jennings’s PhD thesis provides a good comparison group (Jennings 2010). Her comparison of eight cemetery populations from across the English–Scottish border from the 7th through to the 17th centuries reflects on the physiological stresses faced by populations which are within conflict zones (evinced along the English–Scottish border,

particularly during the Rough Wooing of the 15th and 16th centuries (Jennings 2010: 53–64)). Within her results it is evident that there are a wide-range of pathologies present across the local medieval populations, that there are increased rates for non-specific indicators of stress amongst all demographic groups, infections were higher, and malnutrition directly affected children in the conflict zone populations more than in surrounding populations (ibid: 244). She did not examine degenerative changes so this cannot be commented on, but this perspective allows us to place our individuals from the ‘rampart’ into their cultural context: in 15th century Jedburgh, violence and stress were a regular part of life as the Border Wars raged on. Perhaps this helps to explain the periosteal reactions observed on the female individual’s remains, or the healed fracture to the male individual’s nose. While the specific details of the origins of these pathologies on these individuals is impossible to determine, their skeletons have provided an insight into the lives and lifeways of those being buried at Jedburgh Abbey.