



HISTORIC  
ENVIRONMENT  
SCOTLAND

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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# JEDBURGH ABBEY



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# HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

## JEDBURGH ABBEY

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# I. SUMMARY

## 1.1 Introduction

The monument comprises the upstanding and buried remains of the Augustinian Abbey of St Mary standing on what is thought to have been a much earlier religious site. The main components are the largely complete shell of the abbey church itself, together with the excavated lower walls of the cloister buildings to its south and a graveyard to its north. There is a substantial collection associated with the site comprising many architectural carved stones and finds from various excavations. Among these are some very significant and high quality artefacts dating from the 800s.

Jedburgh Abbey was founded as a priory in about 1138 by David 1 and his sometime tutor, Bishop John of Glasgow, and was raised to abbey status circa 1154. The abbey was repeatedly attacked by the English throughout its history. After the Reformation the abbey church was used for parochial worship, and a manse built on the site of the west cloister range. Both were made redundant when a new kirk and manse were built across the Jed Water in 1875. Major archaeological excavations took place in the 1930s and later in the 1980s, revealing much of the cloister complex.

The Abbey is set within the town of Jedburgh and is the key feature of views from the South. It welcomes around 23,000 visitors per year. There is a visitor centre housing an exhibition and interpretation. A separate building houses a display of carved stones, though the display represents only a small fraction of the collection, most of which is in safe storage near the site.

## 1.2 Statement of Significance

These bullet points encapsulate our current understanding of the main significances of Jedburgh Abbey. A broader overview of the cultural and natural heritage values of the place is given in section 2.

- Jedburgh Abbey is important as one of the group of reformed monastic institutions founded by David 1 as part of his campaign to consolidate the power of the Scottish crown. As the building work progressed over a period of approximately 70 years, the scale and ambition of the completed Abbey so close to the border were a clear statement of David 1's ambitions for the standing of the Scottish church, and for the face he wished it to present towards England.
- The Abbey demonstrates the continuing reliance of the Scottish royal house on the Augustinian order as one of the main vehicles of church reform, with their houses tending to be on a larger scale than comparable houses for the order in England. Jedburgh is one of the

most valuable indicators of the architectural inter-relationships between England and Scotland in the course of the 12th century. The completeness of its survival compared to other border abbeys makes it easy to appreciate the quality and scale of the complex in its heyday.

- The excavation and subsequent laying-out of the cloister buildings provide one of the most complete examples of medieval monastic arrangements in Scotland. Coupled with this, the range of finds and increased understanding of the phases of building and rebuilding within the cloisters has given a very firm base for interpretation at this site and a greater understanding of life at the abbey over many centuries.
- While our main appreciation of the monument today centres on its Augustinian incarnation, the site is important historically as the location of an earlier Anglian religious community. High quality artefacts such as the Jedburgh Shrine and the Jedburgh Comb surviving from this time, are of national or international significance in their own right.
- While many Scottish abbeys are important landscape features which dominate their surroundings, Jedburgh Abbey stacked high above the A68 provides a particularly impressive vista. Added to this, the proximity to the Border makes the Abbey particularly important in punctuating many visitors arrival into Scotland.

## 2. ASSESSMENT OF VALUES

### 2.1 Background

Jedburgh has a long history as a religious centre and it is thought that this site may have been in religious occupation from at least the 9th century. Documentary evidence and recovered artefacts clearly point to a pre-Augustinian phase on or near the abbey site, however, no conclusive evidence of contemporary structures has yet been found. Therefore this overview of the development of the site begins with the founding of the present abbey.

Date	Event
Mid 15th century	North transept rebuilt and extended, possibly resultant on structural issues, but also to give an additional altar, which may have been intended as a chantry. The upper part of the west gable and rose window were reconstructed.

<p><b>16th-18th centuries</b></p>	<p>The Abbey was in general decline during the 16th century, in part due to war with England; around 1548 defensive earthworks (the Ramparts) were built to the east. After the reformation the decline accelerated; the abbey church was subdivided in various ways to serve as the parish church and the north transept walled off as the Ker family burial vault (Lothian Aisle).</p>
<p><b>19th century-present</b></p>	<p>Jedburgh has a long history of conservation dating from 1826 when public subscription paid for the strapping of the tower with two, 3” by 1/4 iron bands set into the masonry. In 1875 a new parish church was built on another site and the period of “restoration” of the Abbey began in earnest. The 9th Marquis of Lothian oversaw the late 19th century work, including the rebuilding of the west end of the south aisle wall, including the elaborate south west portal. The North crossing piers, exhibiting signs of weakness, were encased in additional masonry. As well as rebuilding, much of the post-reformation work was demolished or “cleared”.</p> <p>The Abbey passed into state care in 1913 and early conservation works again addressed the recurrent issue of stability of the crossing. The 19th century repairs were reversed, and the failed stone cores of the piers were removed and replaced with new concrete before the piers were underpinned. From this time a continuous programme of repairs and maintenance was undertaken.</p>

## 2.2 Evidential values

The site has high evidential value both for information already recovered by excavation and study, and in terms of future potential to yield more information. The site’s upstanding physical fabric, buried structures and deposits contain a great deal of evidence about monastic life as well as more general information regarding social history and material culture through time.

### Archaeological Evidence

During the 1980s, there was extensive excavation of the cloister area which allowed a good understanding of the various phases of development in these areas, including timber structures which pre-date the 13th century stone claustral buildings. Jedburgh represents one of very few extensive, modern archaeological excavations undertaken on a monastic house in Scotland. The scale and scope of the work, which opened most of the claustral ranges over 2 main seasons of excavation provided a unique opportunity to trace the evolution of the main ranges, their precursors and successors.

In addition, the terraced nature of the site promoted significant survival of many E/W walls where their Southern faces stood well above their North faces. Drains running down towards the river also provided close dating assemblages for the main buildings as well as providing sealed archaeologically rich contexts. Well preserved foundation cuts and rich occupation/ demolition deposits enabled the detailed phasing of those structures at the SW and E limits of the site (these were generally untouched by the 1935-9 excavations). This combination brought to light significant results in terms of artefacts, structures and palaeo - environmental information.

Finds discovered include many artefacts which help illuminate the history and development of the site (see historic evaluation) from fragments of utilitarian clay pots to finely crafted objects, such as fragments of fine 9th century stone sculpture cross and the famous Jedburgh comb. These artefacts indicate the high potential for discovery of other buried deposits in other parts of the site. For further discussion of the evidential values of the collections see Appendix 3.

#### **Further archaeological potential**

While the above investigations mean that little new material is likely to come to light within the area of the excavations, there is very high potential for other future discoveries, especially in the church footprint and to the north. Surviving graves in the church footprint and kirkyard to the north may date from the 12th to 19th centuries and can provide information on the population over a relatively long time period.

The site of the principal entrance to the abbey precinct is likely to lie beneath the Newgate, a gatehouse and tower dating to the 18th century. However, there is also excellent potential for medieval road and yard surfaces to survive beneath Abbey Close, to the west of the abbey church.

#### **Archival and other associated evidence**

An extensive archaeological archive and photographs of the site are held in the RCAHMS. These archives provide a valuable resource for evaluating the archaeology of the site.

### **2.3 Historical values**

In its historic associations and architectural style Jedburgh Abbey should be considered in the context both of the Scottish crown's campaign to bring Scotland under stable and secure government and in the wider context of reformed monasticism developing in Europe. The many new religious houses founded by David I were both instruments to improve administration of government and expressions of spirituality. They were also opportunities to present through their architectural magnificence the

culture, learning and power of the crown. This latter aspect is discussed at 2.4 below, while the main strands of historic interest are discussed here:

### **Ecclesiastical history changing forms of monastic life and religious worship**

Jedburgh is important as one of David I's Augustinian foundations. These are often seen to re occupy earlier sites and to have close associations with royal castles. This is seen at Stirling (Cambuskenneth) and Edinburgh (Holyrood) as well as Jedburgh. The Scottish Augustinian houses tended to be somewhat larger than their English counterparts and the order seems to have been particularly favoured by the Scottish crown.

As has been noted, Jedburgh was the probable site of a 9th-century Anglian religious community, whose artistic creativity is evident in the outstanding Jedburgh Shrine. The Shrine and other finds from this Anglian period are rare and are of great significance.

Jedburgh is one of the four Borders abbeys in State care; the others are Dryburgh (Premonstratensian), Kelso (Tironensians), and Melrose (Cistercian). All were part of David I's ambitious programme to establish the reformed monastic orders in Scotland. These foundations were part of a fundamental modernisation and reorganisation of the Church, bringing Scotland into line with the Continental church. They would have revolutionised the devotional and liturgical lives of local people, some of whom would have been drawn to the abbey's ranks. The abbey served as a place of worship for the townspeople throughout the Middle Ages, and exclusively so after the Reformation. The new parish church constructed in the nave reflected the radically different Presbyterian form of worship, centred not on the mass but on the word of God as contained in the Bible.

### **Political history and border warfare**

Because of its location only 10 miles from the border, Jedburgh was particularly vulnerable to cross border attack. Historically and politically the Abbey was closely linked to Jedburgh Castle, a medieval royal stronghold sited on a hill just west of the abbey. Both Abbey and castle were frequently fought over during the wars of independence and again in the 15th and 16th centuries.

There is much documentary evidence for this, and the scale of destruction is also evident in the fabric of the Abbey, for example in the lowered rooflines and traces of cross walls which partitioned the parts of the abbey made derelict from the parts still capable of use (principally the area of the crossing and north transept). By the mid-16th century the picture of an embattled and entrenched community emerges with the Abbey complex in varying stages of dereliction. English and Franco-Scottish armies fought for possession of the town and Abbey and the Abbey site was partially fortified. The area to the north east still known as *the Ramparts* was a

defensive earthwork, and part of the cloister range was built upon to form a gun emplacement.

### **Associations with nationally important figures**

The Abbey is principally associated with various members of the Scottish royal family, including David I (co-founder, with bishop John of Glasgow), Malcolm IV (who died in Jedburgh Castle in 1165) and Alexander III (who married his second queen here in 1285).

Other key historic figures who had a direct influence upon the development of the Abbey include clerics associated with rebuilding works during the 15th century and whose heraldic devices or initials appear in the fabric of the abbey. They include:

Bishop Turnbull of Glasgow (1447 - 54): the rose window

Abbots John Hall (1478 - 84) and Thomas Cranston (1484 - 8): crossing and choir

Archbishop Robert Blackadder of Glasgow (1483 - 1508): the tower

Mary Somerville (1780-1872), after whom Somerville College, Oxford, is named was also connected to the Abbey. Her uncle, Dr Thomas Somerville, was minister here during the late 18th century, when the nave of the church was in use as the parish church and the manse (demolished c1875) stood on the site of the west cloister. Mary was born in the manse and spent much of her youth there where her uncle encouraged her educational ambitions. Historically, Somerville is important as one of very few women acknowledged for their contribution to science. Her writings on mathematics and astronomy were so influential that she was made an honorary fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society.

The Abbey has strong connections to the Ker family (latterly marquises of Lothian). Primarily this is evidenced in the Lothian aisle, constructed in 1681 within the N transept. It was the 9th Marquis of Lothian who was responsible for the removal of the parish church and manse from within the abbey walls and for many works of restoration and reconstruction.

### **History and development of the burgh**

Jedburgh was a place of some importance from early times both politically, as a fortified stronghold and for its religious connections. A fragment of a Roman altar dedicated to Jupiter has been incorporated into the walling of the Abbey; it is thought to originate from the nearby fort at Cappuck and provides a tangible link to the area's early history.

Both the castle and Abbey were well established before the town was granted a royal charter in 1170, and the early development of the burgh was intimately connected with both these power centres. The castle was finally destroyed in 1409 and the town has also lost other significant medieval buildings such as the 13th century Maison Dieu and 14th century Fransiscan

Friary, so the abbey represents Jedburgh's most tangible link with the early history of the burgh. The abbey continued as the centre of religious worship in the burgh in post reformation times up to 1875.

From at least the 18th century the abbey ruins were an important focus for the perception of Jedburgh as a historic burgh and picturesque subject. An oil painting by William Wilson depicting the Abbey in 1803 is an example of this trend and is on display in the visitor centre. Restoration works, first by the Marquis of Lothian and later during the period of state care, contribute to our perception of the abbey as a picturesque ruin. Famous visitors who came to view the abbey included: Robert Burns, William and Dorothy Wordsworth and JMW Turner. Sir Walter Scott was a great advocate for the abbey, recommending it as a site to visit.

## 2.4 Architectural and artistic values

### Abbey Church

Compared to the other major 12th century churches in Scotland, Jedburgh survives in relative completeness. While the groundplan developed somewhat in scale and ambition from its first inception, the basic formula of aisleless presbytery, aisled choir, crossing with tower and aisled nave was retained in the completed structure.

The high degree of surviving fabric makes it easy to appreciate the scale and magnificence of the 13th century abbey. While most of the above ground portions of the cloister buildings have been lost, the sloping ground has helped preserve masonry towards the lower end of the site above the river. Here it was less easy to rob stone, and the site proved less amenable to large scale clearance and reoccupation. Thus the remains give a good idea of the scale of the whole complex.

The architectural styles of the two main building campaigns (Romanesque and transitional gothic) are closely related and are easy to distinguish and appreciate on site. Both these main phases of work have similarities with contemporary ecclesiastical architecture in Scotland, England and in France. While it is impossible to be absolutely certain about these influences, it is possible to draw some tentative conclusions:

The foundation phase of the abbey church was to a variation of a plan possibly first used for the Archbishop of York's collegiate church at Southwell, in Nottinghamshire. The Romanesque two-bay aisled choir is remarkable for the giant cylindrical piers that rise through both arcade and gallery levels. This is an unusual motif also found in a group of buildings in southern England, including the abbeys of Reading (Berks), where David I was a benefactor, and Romsey (Hants), where his aunt was abbess. These connections show how widely David I was prepared to look in order to provide his church with appropriate buildings.

The later nave of the 1180s shows the direct influence of St Andrews Cathedral Priory, itself almost certainly inspired by the Cistercian Abbey of Byland in Yorkshire and by York Minster. Jedburgh in turn inspired Arbroath Abbey and priories at Lannercost and Hexham – lowland Scotland and northern England being part of the same architectural province.

These stylistic cross-currents show Jedburgh's relationship to architectural development in the 12th and early 13th centuries. This in turn reflects the Scottish crown's concern to be seen to be at the forefront of patronage, particularly in the sensitive area of the Borders.

Jedburgh was recognised as an exceptional survival of Romanesque and early gothic architecture in a Scottish context. The S and West doorways were declared by Sir George Gilbert Scott as "perfect gems of refined Norman of the highest class and most perfect finish". (quoted in Groome 1871). The abbey is also associated with several leading 19th century architects and antiquarians including Robert Rowand Anderson, George Gilbert Scott and Reginald Fairlie. G F Watts the famous Victorian painter and sculptor designed the memorial to the 8th marquis which forms the centrepiece of the Lothian Aisle.

### **Claustral buildings**

Excavation of the footings of the conventual buildings south of the church in 1984-6 showed that their building history is more complex than might have been expected. The chapter house was rebuilt on at least two occasions, while secondary expansion of the cloister involved encroachments into both the west and south ranges, with the new south walk being slotted below the refectory, as at the Augustinian Inchcolm Abbey. An intriguing feature is a 13th-century structure running parallel to, and immediately south of, the refectory, in which position it is most likely to have been the abbot's residence.

### **Collections and Finds**

The excavations yielded a substantial amount of window glass (about 270 items) one of the largest collections from any Scottish monastic or ecclesiastical site. It includes fragments of painted *grisaille* glass likely to date from the 13th century and so may be illustrative of the glass used when the Abbey was in its most complete state.

Other finds, such as the **Jedburgh Shrine**, a fragment of an intricately carved stone sarcophagus of the early 800s and the **Jedburgh comb** indicate the high level of craftsmanship and sophistication present in some high-status artefacts associated the pre-Augustinian site. Dated to around 1100, the tiny walrus-ivory comb is intricately carved with mythical beasts on one side and a depiction of a warrior (possibly Hercules) in combat with

a dragon on the other. Thought to originate in England or northern France, it's small size indicates use as a beard-comb.

More detail on the extensive collections associated with Jedburgh Abbey is given at Appendix 3.

## 2.5 Landscape and aesthetic values

Jedburgh is an attractive town, set in a gently rolling landscape fringed by a fast-flowing river. The Abbey is a key townscape feature. Until relatively recently the area around the abbey was rather more built up, chiefly with the town's mills. Their removal (1960s) and the subsequent landscaping of the area, together with the removal of the West Bow and the redisplay of the cloister (1980s), has greatly enhanced the view of the abbey from across the Jed Water to the south.

The abbey church itself is large and impressive and the view from the South driving on the A68 is now completely open. The vista on approaching Jedburgh along the A68, rounding the bend and seeing the Abbey set high above the road, is one of the great visual delights for visitors entering Scotland by this road.

Close to, the site also impresses, particularly the steepness of the ground and the extent of the terracing. This creates a dramatic stacked series of ranges dominated by the Abbey Church built on the summit; the modern visitor approach on walkways oversailing the excavated cloisters allows full appreciation of this aspect of the site.

The abbey has been greatly admired as a ruin within a semi-urban landscape from at least the later 18th century. As such, it has been the subject of many paintings and engravings by artists (including Turner) seeking a suitably Picturesque subject for their work.

## 2.6 Natural heritage values

The Abbey site is bounded by the Jed Water which forms part of the River Tweed Special Area of Conservation<sup>1</sup>. This is an international designation and the designated area is extensive including the River Tweed and its tributaries. The primary purpose is the protection of otters and fish (salmon and lamphreys).

The Abbey is a potential bat roost site; this should be confirmed by survey. Within the site boundaries there is a mixture of amenity grassland, semi-improved neutral grassland and un-improved neutral grassland. To the south of the abbey by the river there is a small area of Unimproved Neutral Grassland. This habitat type is one of the most threatened lowland habitat

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<sup>1</sup> [NatureScot, River Tweed SAC \(8369\) \(sitelink.nature.scot\)](https://www.nature.scot/river-tweed-sac-8369)

types in the country and has survived here as a result of the protection it has as a historical site.

A number of the plants found here may have had historical uses. Of particular note are those with obvious medicinal uses, hedge woundwort, crossword and garlic mustard, and green alkanet which was introduced specifically for its use as a dye.

Overall, the site has some natural heritage importance which sensitive management could further support. The rarer plant types noted above could also be used in interpreting the site.

## 2.7 Contemporary/use values

### Visitors

Jedburgh Abbey today functions mainly as a tourist attraction, with a strong educational component. It is an important draw for the historic burgh among a range of other heritage sites including The Castle (Gaol); Mary Queen of Scots House and the Capon Tree.

The visitor centre has good displays and selected artefacts (including the Jedburgh Shrine and the famous 'Jedburgh Comb').

### Community

Jedburgh Abbey is an important icon for the burgh in giving it historic context and also as a visual townscape feature. Most obviously, the Abbey is the 'front face' of the burgh for those approaching from the south. Meaning is also generated by the graveyard on the north side of the abbey church. The town's website uses images and the history of the abbey to help define the town.

The church hosts concerts and other town events (for example, the Common Riding) from time to time. Picnics are also possible on the grassy area beside the Jed Water on the south edge of the site.

Ecumenical services are occasionally held in the abbey and it therefore has a continuing spiritual significance. The completeness of the abbey church, the long history of the site and the survival of religious artefacts from pre-Augustinian and later times help people appreciate the sense of religious devotion which the site has inspired over many centuries.

## 3. MAJOR GAPS IN UNDERSTANDING

- What was the nature and extent of the Anglian presence on the site, and in the immediate period before the founding of the abbey c.1138?
- What was the layout of the wider abbey precinct, and how did it relate to the burgh?

- What was the detailed history of the abbey, and the role of its abbots in national affairs?

## 4. ASSOCIATED PROPERTIES

(*other relevant sites locally*) - Jedburgh Friary; Jedburgh Castle.

(*the other Border abbeys*) - **Dryburgh; Kelso; Melrose.**

(*other major 12th-century Augustinian foundations in Scotland*) - **Cambuskenneth Abbey; Holyrood Abbey; St Andrews Cathedral Priory; Inchcolm Abbey.**

## 5. KEYWORDS

Romanesque, Gothic, clearstorey, nave, cloister, Augustinian, David I, ecclesiastical

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX I: TIMELINE

Blue text indicates events directly evidenced in fabric of Abbey

Date	Event
9th Century	It is likely that a religious community occupied the area on which the abbey now stands from the 9th century onwards. The location of buildings from this very early time is not known.

c. 830	the site of the later abbey is almost certainly one of the two <i>Gedweardes</i> granted to Lindisfarne by Bishop Ecgred of Durham.
c.1100	the discovery in 1985 of the 'Jedburgh Comb' and other quality artefacts suggests that the site was functioning as a religious establishment in the decades prior to the founding of the Augustinian monastery.
c.1138	the Augustinian house is established as a priory by David I and Bishop John of Glasgow. The founding brethren probably come from St Quentin, near Beauvais, France. Its establishment may have marked the healing of a rift with the papacy over the refusal of the Scottish Church to accept the authority of the archbishops of York. (directly evidenced in fabric of Abbey)
c.1154	the priory is raised to abbey status.
1165	Malcolm IV dies in Jedburgh Castle
1285	Alexander III and Yolande de Dreux are married in the abbey church
c.1305	Edward I of England's army strip lead from the church roof
Mid 1400s	the abbey is reported to be in disrepair. Repairs and rebuilding are associated with Bishop Turnbull of Glasgow (1447-54), Abbot John Hall (1478-9), Abbot Thomas Cranston (1484-1501) and Archbishop Blackadder of Glasgow (1483-1508). (directly evidenced in fabric of Abbey)
1520	One of the Hume family becomes commendator of Jedburgh.
1523, 1544-1545	the abbey is attacked by the English
1548	A Franco-Scottish force holds the abbey against the English and carried out defensive works.
Post 1560	The central crossing of the church is fitted out for use as the parish church.
1606	Alexander Lord Hume acquires the abbey estates as a temporal lordship.
1668-71	a new parish church is formed within the five west bays of the nave and north nave aisle.
1681	the north transept is walled off and formed into a private burial aisle (the Lothian Aisle) for the family of the future 1st marquis of Lothian, whose family own the abbey estates. (directly evidenced in fabric of Abbey)
1875	a new parish church and manse are built on the far side of the Jed Water and the church and manse in the abbey are demolished.
1913	The church and part of the cloister are taken into state care. Conservation of the church continues.

1935-9	part of the cloister is explored and exposed
1984	the rest of the cloister down to the Jed Water, then largely hidden beneath the West Bow, a public road, is taken into care.
1984-6	large-scale excavations remove the West Bow and reveal much of the remainder of the cloister. A new visitor centre is formed in a 19th-century dwelling at the SE corner of the site (directly evidenced in fabric of Abbey)
2001	The Lothian Aisle taken into state care.