

Although the fort at Rough Castle is the second smallest on the Wall, it is easily the best-preserved and offers the most spectacular and memorable views of the surviving Roman remains. One can see an excellent example of the Antonine Wall Ditch, the tallest-surviving portion of Rampart, defensive lilia pits to the north of the Wall, an easily identifiable fort and annexe, and defences including multiple ditches and gateways.

HISTORY OF DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION:

The excellent preservation of Rough Castle made it very well known to antiquaries, and its Roman origins were widely acknowledged from the seventeenth century onward. In 1843, an altar to Victory was found to the south of the fort, and the Glasgow Archaeological Society's Antonine Wall Committee cut several sections across the Antonine Wall Rampart in the early 1890s. The fort itself was first excavated between 1902-03, revealing some of its internal buildings, a bath-house within the fort's annexe (attached to the fort's east side), and ten rows of large defensive pits (called lilia, based on Julius Caesar's description of similar pits at Alesia in Gaul) to the north of the Antonine Wall Ditch. While the ramparts

and ditches of both the fort and annexe, as well as those of the Antonine Wall in this area, were extremely well-preserved, the structures within the fort's interior had not survived so well. Subsequent excavations were carried out in 1920, 1932-33, and then again in 1957-61 (following the site being placed in guardianship in 1953), clarifying particular points and revealing some new information. Since the 1940s, the fort has been extensively photographed from the air and on the ground, and numerous watching briefs have been conducted in the area throughout the 1990s and 2000s. In 1982, excavations took place in a field system to the south-east of the fort's annexe, revealing enclosures of multiple periods.

DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION:

Although the fort at Rough Castle is the best-preserved on the Antonine Wall, it is also the second smallest known along the line, with an internal area of only 0.4ha (1 acre), and an annexe, that was even larger than the fort, attached to its east side. The fort faces north, with the Antonine Wall Rampart and Ditch serving as its northern defences, but excavation

has revealed that the fort itself was later than the Wall, with its own ramparts abutting the south face of the Antonine Wall Rampart. The stone base of the Rampart has been measured at 4.5m wide, with the Ditch measuring 12m wide. The fort's own ramparts were considerable wider than that of the Antonine Wall: a section cut near the fort's north-west corner revealed excellently-

preserved turfwork of the fort's rampart, 6.10m wide at the base and 1.37m high above kerb foundations. Within this section, as many as 18 "laminations", or turf layers, were visible. The fort originally featured two ditches around its south and west sides, with a single ditch along the southern half of the east side, between the fort and annexe. Later, a second ditch was added to the south-east, and a very small section of ditch was added a considerable distance west of the fort, north of the road that exited from the fort's west gate. On the fort's east side was the annexe, with a turf rampart, a single ditch on the south, and three ditches on the east, which may have been separated by further portions of turf ramparts; this is very unusual, and may indicate that there had been several different phases and formats to the Roman defences.

Within the fort's interior were found the remains of a stone headquarters building (principia), granary (horreum), and commanding officer's house (praetorium). The principia was noticeably small and contained four ranges of rooms. In the centre of the southern-most range, almost certainly the shrine of the standards, was a stone-lined strongbox, sunk into the floor. In a pit or possible well within the principia were found three fragments of a building inscription (RIB 2145) of the Sixth Cohort of Nervians. This proved to be very significant at the time of its discovery in 1903, as this inscription specified that the Romans called this building the principia, while scholars across the former Roman empire had been mistakenly referring to headquarters buildings as the praetorium. Near the fort's west gate was the remains of what is almost certainly the real praetorium, the commanding officer's house, which appears to be modelled on the usual accommodation provided to a Roman legionary centurion. This may indicate that the fort was commanded by a centurion, a suggestion that may be further supported by an inscription on the altar to Victory (RIB 2144) found south of the fort in 1843: the inscription indicates that the altar was

dedicated by the Sixth Cohort of Nervians, who were commanded at the time by Flavius Betto, a centurion of the Twentieth Legion. In the fort's north-west corner were two barracks. There were signs of alterations in nearly every building but, despite early suggestions that these represent multiple distinct occupations of the site, these are now interpreted as routine changes during the course of a single occupation period.

Within the fort's annexe was found a stone bath-house to the south of the Military Way, and a ditched and cobble-surfaced enclosure located just outside the fort's north-east corner. Only the basement foundations and hypocausts of the bath-house remained, with brick-built pillars that were occasionally replaced by stone pillars, probably indicating repairs or alterations. The ditched enclosure in the annexe's north-west corner remains a puzzle: it's function and chronological relationship to the Wall and fort remain uncertain, but it has occasionally been suggested as a fortlet that was later surrounded by the fort and annexe. Due to the fort's small size, and the fact that its ramparts are known to have been constructed after the Antonine Wall Rampart was built in this area, Rough Castle is considered to be one of the "secondary" forts on the Wall: probably not part of the original "plan" for the frontier, and only added after a decision was made to add additional forts to an originally-designed series of six.

A wide range of pottery has been found within the fort, including Samian ware, Black Burnished ware, and mortaria, all of which can be comfortably dated to the period around AD 140-60 (though many fragments could also be later). There are some notable late pottery pieces though, including sherds of Samian ware and Black Burnished ware that are probably from closer to AD 200, after the suspected Roman abandonment of the Antonine Wall. A significant number of leather fragments were recovered from the Antonine Wall Ditch, including two shoes that are almost

complete. Glass finds included a bangle and several pieces of window glass.

Excavations within the field system to the south-east of the annexe revealed a long history of activity and enclosure in this area, with some features dated as early as the Neolithic or Early Bronze Age, and many more of much more recent date. It is possible that

some of the enclosures encountered within this area were developed during the Roman period, and this may be the closest thing we have to evidence of a possible civilian settlement (vicus) at Rough Castle, although it is equally possible that such plots were used by soldiers. There are no clearly dateable structural remains for a vicus here, and this interpretation must remain speculation.

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