

Perhaps the best-preserved section of Antonine Wall Ditch can be viewed to both the east and west of Watling Lodge along Tamfourhill Road, easily accessible to the south-west of Falkirk town centre and just east of the Falkirk Wheel.

Here, the Ditch has survived to almost its original dimensions, giving the best view of how it may have looked in Roman times. Near this portion of Ditch, on the site of Watling Lodge (now a location of the Barnardo's childrens' charity), was an Antonine Wall fortlet and a medieval motte (called "Maiden Castle"). The motte was destroyed when the arts and crafts villa "Watling Lodge" was built on top of it in the 1890s, while the fortlet lies within the area of Watling Lodge's garden to the south. No visible traces of the motte or fortlet can be seen on the ground. A short distance to the south, in an open field between the Union Canal and Tamfourhill Wood, is the site of a Roman temporary camp, which is sometimes visible in aerial photographs, but which cannot be seen on the ground today.

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### HISTORY OF DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION:

The antiquarian writers noted the excellent preservation of the Ditch along Tamfourhill Road, along with a distinct gap in the Wall where a Roman road provided access to the north of the frontier, but few clearly describe the Roman fortlet or medieval motte. An "anonymous traveller" writing in 1697, however, did note the motte calling it "Maiden Castle", while in 1757 the often-overlooked antiquary William Maitland described "the Madun-castle" as "a fort on the wall to guard the gateway" for the Roman road that passed through the Wall here. In the 1720s, Alexander Gordon identified a large "square Watch Tower" some distance to the east of Rough Castle fort, describing its area as about 25m on each side. Due to the paced distances he provides in his description, this has been primarily interpreted as referring to the Tentfield East "expansion" that is located a short distance to the west of Watling Lodge. If so, Gordon greatly exaggerated the size of this "expansion", which has been measured as only 9.7m by 5.5m.

The current "Watling Lodge" arts and crafts villa was constructed upon the Antonine Wall's Outer Mound in 1894, directly on top of the "Maiden Castle" motte, which was completely removed at that time. The Falkirk antiquary Mungo Buchanan observed the preparations and construction on the site, during which he recognised and recorded the remains of a Roman "guard-house" that was attached to the south face of the Antonine Wall Rampart. This "guard-house" was thought to be an isolated and unique feature until its significance as part of a broader scheme of installations was realised with the 1947 discovery of a fortlet at Duntocher and later identification of further fortlets in aerial photographs. The site was later excavated between 1972-74, clarifying details of the fortlet's location and plan.

Throughout the early twentieth century, Sir George Macdonald investigated the line of the Wall through various small trenches, identifying a recognisable change in the

Rampart's building material to either side of Watling Lodge. This has been largely confirmed through later investigations.

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## DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION:

The Antonine Wall Ditch through Tamfourhill is preserved to almost its original Roman dimensions, measuring about 12m wide and 4.5m deep. Investigations along the line of the Wall have identified a clear change in building materials for the Antonine Wall Rampart, with stacked turves being used to the west of Watling Lodge, but the 15km stretch from Watling Lodge eastward being primarily composed of earth or clay held in place by clay cheeks. Various arguments have been given for this contrast, including a suggested scarcity of turf in the Wall's eastern sector, a change in plan during the construction of the Wall, and the possibility that the Wall originally started at Watling Lodge and was only extended eastward at a later date. This reason for this difference remains an unresolved issue.

Excavations have revealed that the fortlet at Watling Lodge measured about 18.5m by 15.5m internally, with turf ramparts set on top of a stone base. The fortlet was of one build with the Antonine Wall, and it used the Antonine Wall Rampart and Ditch as its northern defences.

Around the fortlet's east, west, and south sides was a single ditch, measuring about 2.8m wide and 1m deep. There were gateways on the north and south, with a metalled road running through the fortlet, and heading north through a gap in the Antonine Wall Ditch toward the outpost fort at Camelon. The 1970s excavations focused on the lines

of the fortlet's defences, and only a very small portion of the trenches extended into the fortlet's interior, just within the south-west corner, where a hearth was located. The only finds were a few pottery fragments of Roman and medieval date. Excavation to the south of the fortlet in advance of development in 1986 revealed traces of a road and a series of post-holes, along with Roman and medieval pottery. The structures indicated by the post-holes may relate to Roman or medieval activities.

The "Maiden Castle" motte at Watling Lodge was probably constructed in the twelfth century, and was located on top of the Antonine Wall's Outer Mound, apparently using the Ditch as its southern defence. No precise measurements survive, but Macdonald noted that the mound had been reduced in height by about 2m in order to form a level platform for the construction of the Watling Lodge villa. Examination of the area has allowed investigators from RCAHMS to suggest that the motte's summit may have measured about 21m by 12m.

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