

DUNTOCHER: FORT, FORTLET AND BATH-HOUSE

Duntocher marks the first visible remains of the Antonine Wall's line from the west, where the Ditch can be traced today from around Duntocher Burn eastwards to Golden Hill. A bridge, called "Roman Bridge," crosses the Duntocher Burn: despite the name, the current bridge is of eighteenth-century construction and was rebuilt in 1943 following damage sustained during the Second World War.

It is very likely that a bridge was located around here in Roman times, but visitors should be aware that the current structure is much more modern. On the west slope of Golden Hill a Roman bath-house was discovered near the Duntocher War Memorial just north of the Trinity Parish Church, and a short length of the Rampart's stone base is visible within a railed enclosure further up the hill. On the top of the hill, within the public Golden Hill Park, a small fort (with annexe) and an earlier fortlet have been located and excavated. Subtle traces of the fort are visible in aerial photographs, but no remains are visible on the ground. To aid the visual identification of the fort's location, West Dunbartonshire Council has begun to strategically mow grass on the site in order to highlight the lines of the fort, fortlet, and Antonine Wall's ramparts. The prominent position of Golden Hill Park offers excellent views of the surrounding landscape.

HISTORY OF DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION:

The name Duntocher means "the fort on the causeway," indicating that the Roman fort and the Military Way remained visible and known in the early post-Roman centuries, with the Military Way probably retaining an important function. The fort was also known to eighteenth-century antiquaries (Alexander Gordon, the Rev John Horsley, and General William Roy), who provided conflicting plans of its outline. In 1775 a Roman bath-house was discovered during trench digging to the west of the fort near the site of the bridge that crosses over Duntocher Burn. This bath-house was then excavated under the supervision of staff from Glasgow University, and the results of this excavation were published in Richard Gough's 1789 edition of Camden's *Britannia*. Among the finds discovered at this time was a small stone female statuette (now at the

Hunterian Museum) that was probably used as a decorative pipe support (or "gurget") within the bath-house.

Recording work by General William Roy and, later, the Ordnance Survey had provided plans of a fort that was much longer (east-to-west) than it was broad (south-to-north). The first real archaeological work was in the form of a few exploratory trenches that were dug in 1933 by John Clarke. Though this excavation was unpublished and did not clarify the fort's overall plan, Sir George Macdonald noted that the excavation had at least confirmed that the fort's ramparts were probably of turf rather than stone. More extensive excavation occurred between 1948–51 under the direction of Prof Anne S. Robertson, who succeeded in revealing the fort's full outline

and discovered that the fort was much smaller than expected, with an annexe of almost double the size of the fort itself. Further, Robertson's excavations revealed that the fort was built before the line of the Antonine Wall reached Duntocher, and that even before this small fort was built, an earlier fortlet had stood on the summit of the hill. While the fortlet at Watling Lodge, near Falkirk, had been discovered in the 1890s, it was with the fortlet discovery at Duntocher that this class of installation was properly recognised.

Further archaeological work at Duntocher has included excavations in 1977–78, which revealed the stone base of the fortlet and led to the chance rediscovery of part of the nearby bath-house, as well as a pottery kiln located about 80m south-west of the fort. It was initially planned to leave the fortlet's base exposed as part of a visitor's exhibit, but the site was eventually backfilled. More recently, geophysical survey was carried out in the area of the bath-house in 2001, in order to more completely determine its location and extent, but this provided inconclusive results.

DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION:

Excavations have revealed that the earliest Roman structure at Duntocher was a small fortlet on the summit of Golden Hill. This fortlet measured about 18m square, and was defended by a 3.6m wide stone-based turf rampart and a single ditch, open to the north. Probably soon after the fortlet was built, but before the Antonine Wall's Rampart or Ditch reached the area, a small fort was attached to the east side of the fortlet. This new fort had an internal area of only 0.2ha (0.5 acres), enclosed by turf ramparts on a 3.9m wide stone base and further defended by three ditches on the east and south, with an annexe of almost twice the size of the fort attached to the west and defended by a single ditch on the west and three ditches on the south.

Uniquely for Antonine Wall forts, the fort at Duntocher did not have a southern gate. The relationship between the fort and the Antonine Wall's Rampart is also somewhat awkward, with the Rampart abutting the fort about 3m south of the fort's south-west corner. To the north of the fort, the Antonine Wall's Ditch is paralleled by a second ditch further north, doubling the northern defences across the entire length of fort, fortlet, and annexe. Within the fort's interior, at least one stone building was identified in the centre of the fort's southern half, while sets of post-

holes were located within both the fort and fortlet, probably representing barrack blocks. The stone building may have served as a, very small, principia or unit headquarters, and this structure revealed evidence for at least one set of alterations.

No clear evidence has been found for a civil settlement (vicus) associated with the fort at Duntocher, and the small size of the fort may indicate that any such settlement would have been equally small. It is possible that the fort's annexe (the interior of which remains unexcavated) may have served both military and civilian purposes, or that the area between the fort/annexe and the bath-house near the bottom of Golden Hill's western slope may have been used for a possible vicus, but future geophysical survey or excavation would be required to test these hypotheses.

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