

South-east of the junction between the M80 and B816, in the area of the old Castlecary schoolhouse, is the site of a Roman fort and annexe on the Antonine Wall.

The fort is bisected by the Edinburgh to Glasgow railway line, which enters the fort at its south-east corner and exits just south of the fort's west gateway. The fort is one of only two along the Antonine Wall to have featured stone ramparts (along with Balmuildy). The portion to the north of the railway can be visited today and visible remains include a low mound and portions of exposed stonework from the fort's east rampart, small portions of the headquarters building, and traces of stonework at the north gate.

HISTORY OF DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION:

The fort at Castlecary remained well-preserved and was noted by antiquaries throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From at least the fifteenth century, the site was robbed of stones to use in nearby buildings, and was a particularly important stone quarry during the 1769-71 construction of the Forth and Clyde Canal in this area. In this period, a stone bath-house was exposed within the fort near its south-east corner. Around 1809 large portions of the fort's ramparts were blasted away with gunpowder in the name of "agricultural improvement." The fort suffered further damage in 1841, when it was cut across by the Edinburgh to Glasgow railway, causing protests from a number of antiquaries. The site was excavated by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1902, confirming that it featured stone ramparts and discovering an unexpected, and still unexcavated, annexe to the east of the fort. The excavation was hasty and incomplete and, following the end of work, the excavation trenches were not back-filled and the exposed remains were not consolidated nor protected, leading to further degradation.

The site has been photographed from the air on numerous occasions, and recorded by surveyors on the ground. While no new excavations have occurred, geophysical surveys—including resistivity, ground penetrating radar, and magnetometry were conducted in 1994 and 2006. The 1994 geophysics revealed double ditches on the fort's south-west corner and east rampart, as well as a single ditch around the annexe on the east side of the fort. The 2006 survey covered areas west and south-east of the fort, identifying a number of anomalies that may represent a possible vicus outside the fort's annexe.

DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION:

Castlecary is one of the larger forts along the Antonine Wall, one of only two to feature stone ramparts, and was built before the Antonine Wall reached the site. For these reasons, the fort is widely considered to be one of the “primary” forts on the Antonine Wall, having been planned from the very beginning before later changes brought about the addition of new “secondary” forts. The fort had an internal area of 1.4ha (3.5 acres), while the attached annexe measured 1.1ha (2.75 acres). The Antonine Wall Rampart, measuring 4.4m at its base, was built up to and away from the fort’s 2.4m-wide stone rampart at its north-east and north-west corners. To the north of the fort, the Antonine Wall Ditch featured a drastic reduction in width: to the east of the fort’s north gate, it measured 12m wide, while it was then reduced to only 4.45m wide to the west of the gateway.

Within the fort were found a stone-built headquarters building (*principia*), granary, part of what was almost certainly the commanding officer’s house (*praetorium*), a bath-house, and a small latrine. A rectangular stone tower was identified at the fort’s rounded south-west corner, and it is probable that similar features were located in all four corners, but had been robbed-out prior to the excavations. Large quantities of grain were found within the fort’s granary, and small leather shoes were found within a rubbish pit, providing good evidence for the presence of women and children at the fort (as also at Balmuildy and Bar Hill). Other finds of note include eleven inscriptions, nine of which are on stone altars; together, these indicate the presence of soldiers from two Roman legions and three auxiliary units at Castlecary. An altar to Fortuna (RIB 2146) was recovered from the fort’s bath-house in the 1760s, along with a stone figurine of the

same goddess; this altar was dedicated by detachments from both the Second and Sixth Legions. The Sixth Legion is further attested on two other altars: one discovered to the west of the fort records the construction of a temple to Mercury (RIB 2148), while the other is dedicated to the mother goddesses by Gaius Julius Speratus and the Sixth Legion (RIB 2151). The First Cohort of Vardullians, 1000 men from northern Spain, are recorded on an altar to Neptune (RIB 2149); the First Cohort of Tungrians, 1000 men from Belgium, are recorded in a building inscription (RIB 2155); and either the First Cohort of Batavians or Baetasians, both from the Netherlands, are recorded on a partial altar dedicated to an unknown deity.

The vast majority of finds can be closely dated to the Antonine period, but a few fragments of pottery may be of late first-century date. This led Sir George Macdonald to suggest that the site was previously occupied by a Flavian fort built by Agricola around AD 80 but, if this was the case, there is no clear evidence for such a structure.

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Roy, W. (1793) The Military Antiquities of the Romans in Britain. London. [Castlecary, including the bath-house, are discussed on pages 160-61, and the bath-house is drawn on plate 39.]