

The Antonine Wall's western terminus was marked by a distance slab, but the westernmost fort lay at Old Kilpatrick (to the north of Glasgow), overlooking the River Clyde.

Today, the fort is located beneath the site of the former Gavinburn Bus Depot and the houses of Gavinburn Gardens, very close to the western end of the Forth and Clyde Canal. Important finds include two sculptured distance slabs, an inscribed altar to Jupiter, and a possible bath-house located within an annexe attached to the fort. Whether or not a Roman harbour was located here, serving as a primary supply base for nautical shipments, remains uncertain. Parts of the area are publicly accessible but no traces of the fort are visible today. Despite the lack of visible Roman remains, the site of Old Kilpatrick fort is worth visiting for the magnificent views across the Clyde: a viewpoint that places the modern visitor at the north-west corner of the former Roman Empire and which, when armed with the knowledge that this location marked the western-most end of both the Antonine Wall and the Forth and Clyde Canal, may allow visitors to reflect upon the relationships between the Roman period, the region's industrial history, and the present.

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## HISTORY OF DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION:

Old Kilpatrick has long been known as the site of a Roman fort, but its precise location remained uncertain until the early twentieth century. In the early eighteenth century, the antiquarians Alexander Gordon and John Horsley noted that all surface traces of the fort had been removed by extensive ploughing, but that its presence was revealed by a large number of Roman stones, some with inscriptions, which had been dug up in the area. Among these was one of the Antonine Wall's famous distance slabs, an elaborately sculptured stone recording work to construct 4411 feet of the Wall by the Twentieth Legion (RIB 2208), discovered a short distance SW of the fort at Ferrydyke before 1684 and now in the Hunterian Museum. A second distance slab (RIB 2207) was also discovered at Ferrydyke in 1758, but was later lost. In 1790, during the construction of the Forth and Clyde Canal, workers revealed a buried stone building between the site of the fort and the River Clyde:

while this is now widely interpreted as the remains of the fort's bath-house, it contained a medieval coin hoard and appears to have gone largely unnoticed at the time, only being reported by a local tenant several years later.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Wall's western terminus and precise line remained uncertain and, although both Gordon and Horsley acknowledged that a fort once stood at Old Kilpatrick, there was some debate over whether or not the Wall had extended as far west as Dunglass or even Dumbarton (the idea that the Wall ended at Dumbarton derived from the Venerable Bede's description, written around AD 730). Such uncertainty continued into the early twentieth century, with very few traces of the Wall definitively identified west of Duntocher until Sir George Macdonald confirmed both the Wall's line and the location of the westernmost fort via systematic survey and small-scale

excavations in 1913. Extensive excavations were carried out in advance of local housing development in 1923-24, directed by S.N. Miller for the Glasgow Archaeological Society; these excavations revealed much of the fort's interior and established its primary dimensions and defences. Dissatisfied with problems regarding the fort's relationship to the line of the Wall, and Miller's theory that Old Kilpatrick had been constructed to serve as a harbour, Macdonald excavated once again in 1931. The 1931 trenches confirmed that the fort was built before the Wall builders reached Old Kilpatrick and that several adjustments were required to connect the line of the Wall's Rampart and Ditch with those of the fort's own defences.

Following the major excavations of the 1920s-30s, archaeological work at Old Kilpatrick has been sporadic and primarily limited to rescue excavations related to commercial and residential development. In 1969, an altar dedicated to Jupiter by the First Cohort of Baetasians (an auxiliary unit from modern-day western Germany, known to have also been stationed at Bar Hill fort) was found within an inspection pit within a service garage located just north of Dumbarton Road (the A814). In 1987 the, now-derelict, garage was scheduled for housing development and excavations were carried out to identify any archaeological features. A great deal of modern

overburden was present, and it appeared as if soil may have been brought to the site before the garage was constructed. The fort's outer ditch was located in three locations, providing a measurement of 4–4.5m wide, while the second ditch was located once, with a measured width of 2.5m. No complete sections were cut and, while the ditches were probed in hopes of finding additional artefacts, no finds were located. Additional archaeological interventions occurred in 1994 and 1999, within the fort's interior and on the site of the bus depot. The 1994 excavation by GUARD revealed cobbling, a road surface, and part of the fort's ditch system below a reconstructed bus-washing facility in the fort's north-west corner, while the 1999 watching brief by AOC located part of the fort's defensive ditch system and confirmed that Roman remains survive below the bus depot.

In addition to the Roman remains, limited evidence for Early Medieval activity has also been found in the area, including two cross slabs of the 10th-12th centuries, both found outside of the Roman fort and any presumed annexe to the southwest of the fort site, within the Auchtorlie Tomb at Old Kilpatrick Parish Church just north of Dumbarton Road (A814) and at Mountblow House near the junction of the A814 and A898.

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## DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION:

Excavations have revealed that the fort at Old Kilpatrick faced the west, had an internal area of 1.7ha (4.2 acres), and was defended by turf ramparts on a 4.4m wide stone base and multiple ditches. The fort was also initially built before the line of the Antonine Wall's Rampart and Ditch, and may have been constructed atop the remains of an earlier fort of Agricolan date (around AD 80); a small amount of pottery has been dated to the late first century, and slight structural remains may

indicate that the site had been used before the establishment of the Antonine frontier (beginning around AD 142). A number of structures have been located within the fort's interior, including the headquarters building (the principia) and a granary (both built of stone), three timber buildings that may have been a barn, workshops, and/or storehouses, six timber barracks, and a stone latrine (toilet).

While excavations have focused on the fort's defences and its interior, there is some evidence for the existence of at least one, but perhaps two, annexes attached to the fort. The continuation of the Antonine Wall and some of the fort's defensive ditches to the south of the fort suggests that this may have helped to enclose an annexe between the fort and the River Clyde.

The report of a bath-house uncovered in this area during the construction of the Forth and Clyde Canal in 1790 strengthens this suggestion, as most Antonine Wall forts featured annexes with bath-houses. A second annexe to the north or east of the fort has very little evidence, though it is possible that the Jupiter altar discovered within the outermost ditch at the fort's north-east corner was dumped into the ditch from its original location within an annexe or civilian settlement (*vicus*) in this area. Unfortunately, nothing is known about the precise location and extent of the fort's civilian population.

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