We continually revise our Statements of Significance, so they may vary in length, format and level of detail. While every effort is made to keep them up to date, they should not be considered a definitive or final assessment of our properties.
ANTONINE WALL -BARRHILL

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The property at Barrhill is part of the Antonine Wall and comprises a Roman fort situated on Barrhill, a smaller, possibly Iron Age, fort to the east on Castle Hill, a 760m stretch of rampart, ditch and upcast bank, and a section of Military Way which runs from the east side of the Roman Fort for about 300m.

The Antonine Wall is a linear Roman frontier system of wall and ditch accompanied at stages by forts and fortlets, linked by a road system termed the Military Way, stretching 60km from Bo’ness on the Forth to Old Kilpatrick on the Clyde. It is one of only three linear barriers along the 2000km European frontier of the Roman Empire. These systems are unique to Britain and Germany.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview

- Iron Age fort on Castle Hill probably existed before the building of the Antonine Wall
- An ‘enclosure’ underlying the Roman fort is either a construction camp of the Antonine period, predating the fort, or else a Flavian fortlet (AD 79–87/88)
- Antonine Wall construction initiated by Emperor Antoninus Pius (AD 138–161) after a successful campaign in AD 139/142 by the Governor of Britain, Lollius Urbicus
- Fort, or nearby Antonine Wall, was built by *legio II Augusta* and *legio XX Valeria Victrix* and also *cohors I Baetasiorum*
- Fort garrisoned by several detachments of soldiers: *legio II Augusta*; *cohors I Baetasiorum*; *cohors I Hamiorum* commanded by a prefect, Caristianus Justanius; another commander, the prefect L Tanicius Verus, is also attested
- Antonine Wall system abandoned, possibly after AD 165, and the line of frontier shifted again to Hadrian’s Wall

Archaeological Overview

1899: Glasgow Archaeological Society cut sections through the ditch and rampart.

1902–05: Excavations by Sir George Macdonald and Mr A Park established the plan of the fort and excavated much of the interior. They uncovered an earlier structure thought to have been a Flavian enclosure. Limited excavation of ditches and finds suggested a civil settlement to the east of the fort. The excavations also located the line of the Military Way to the north of the fort, between it and the Antonine Wall.


1978–80: The fort, bathhouse, latrines and headquarters building were re-excavated for permanent display.

1982: 1899 sections through rampart and ditch were reopened.

1982–84: Excavation and aerial survey of ditches reported in the 1902–05 excavations showed small temporary camp immediately to the south-east of the Roman fort.

1995: Geophysical survey confirmed the route of Antonine Wall rampart west of the Roman fort.

This property has provided a wealth of information, and has the potential to provide more, on the design, function and organisation of the Roman military at the height of the Empire. Moreover, the evidence from the remains of the bathhouse, finds such as dedicatory altars, combined with small finds, provide much data on the cultural lifestyles of Roman soldiers. However, while the colonial material culture of the Romans is most obvious, the impact on the surrounding peoples is not so obvious. The dedication of an altar found at Barhill to Mars Camulus points to the religious mixture of both the Roman and Celtic cultures. Better investigation of any civil settlement would begin to address the wider cultural impact of the Romans on local life.

Artistic/Architectural Overview

Barhill is unique in forts along the Wall as not physically forming part of the Antonine Wall line.

The fort, of 1.3 hectares area, is defended by a turf rampart, 3.7m wide, on a stone platform. Two lines of ditches flank the south, west and east sides while there is only a single ditch on the north side of the fort. Gates are placed on the north, south, east and west sides. There is no gate in the Antonine Wall at this point. Within the fort are the remains of the headquarters building, now visible, where there is evidence for a cultic stand for the unit’s standards, a small room holding the strongbox and a large well and store; there were also workshops, a granary, barracks and a bathhouse.

The Military Way, unusually, also passes between the north side of the fort and the Antonine Wall. The Military Way is extant to the east of the fort.

The Antonine Wall ditch and outer bank are well preserved and average 13m width and c. 2.5m depth. The rampart, built of turf, is discernible in places and forms a low spread some 7m wide and 1m high.

The evidence for a fort on Castle Hill comes from two parallel terraces which are visible on the north-west of the hill but are thought to enclose the whole hill. It has been suggested that the terraces are the remains of rampart and ditches long since gone. Unfortunately, quarrying on the south-east of the site has destroyed some of this evidence.
Social Overview

The monument currently serves as a popular walking route through trees with fine views from Castle Hill.

In 2003 the Scottish Executive announced that the Antonine Wall (including this stretch) would be nominated as a World Heritage Site. Such a designation brought enhanced social significance to the monument and its setting.

Spiritual Overview

There have been various Roman altars and religious dedications found, to Apollo, Mars (Camulus) and Silvanus; the second of these is a mixture of Roman and Celtic gods.

The site does not currently fulfil a spiritual role.

Aesthetic Overview

The property benefits from wooded areas and fine all-round views. The visitor looking east from Castle Hill has a particularly fine view of the Antonine Wall ditch.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

We do not know the precise date or function of the enclosure underlying the Roman fort.

The date and extent of the civil settlement are unknown.

The date and plan of Castle Hill Fort are unknown.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key Points

- Good views from property in all directions
- Unique position of Roman fort in relation to the Antonine Wall
- Unique juxtaposition of Roman fort and Iron Age fort on line of the Antonine Wall
- Part of second best preserved Roman frontier after Hadrian’s Wall

Associated Properties

Hillhead; Bearsden Bathhouse; Croy Hill; Rough Castle; Castlecary; Seabegs Wood; Tamfourhill; Westerwood; Cumbernauld Airfield–Wyndford Road; Wyndford Road

Keywords

Roman frontier; limes; Antonine Wall; Hadrian's Wall; World Heritage Site