

Kinneil offers the only visible example of an Antonine Wall fortlet, in a field to the west of Kinneil House.

The fortlet is marked out by original stone kerbing of its ramparts and part of the Antonine Wall's Rampart (which served as the fortlet's north rampart), with stone paving filling out the areas where original stonework has not survived. Timber posts mark out the location of Roman period post-holes, which give an indication of the fortlet's gateways and internal buildings. The Antonine Wall Ditch can be partially (but not easily) traced in the fields between Kinneil House and the fortlet. Exhibits covering Kinneil's history, including Roman artefacts from the fortlet, are located in the Kinneil Museum.

HISTORY OF DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION:

Kinneil had long been suspected as the site of a Roman fort, though antiquaries were not all in agreement. Confusion may have arisen because of a long-standing medieval village that occupied the fields known as "the Meadows" to the west of Kinneil House, near the site of the ruined medieval church. This village extended over both sides of the Antonine Wall and may have been in existence from the early medieval period, as suggested by the presence of a circular enclosure ditch around the church site and an early medieval cross slab that was reused within the later medieval church building. This village existed until the 1690s, when it was removed to create parkland as part of the Kinneil Estate. Following the Rev John Horsley's hypothesis that there was a Roman fort at approximately every two Roman miles, Kinneil has been a favoured location for an Antonine Wall fort on spacing grounds. Throughout the early 1900s, Sir George Macdonald traced the line of the Antonine Wall through Kinneil and, though he could find no physical evidence for a fort here, he generally accepted Kinneil as the location of an undiscovered Roman fort.

The Roman fortlet was first discovered in 1978, following the discovery of Roman pottery during fieldwalking by the Cumbernauld Historical Society. Two sets of excavations were carried out in 1978-79 and then again in 1980-81, revealing the remains of the fortlet and portions of the Antonine Wall Rampart and Ditch; the entire interior of the fortlet was excavated, but the ditches were only explored through several sample trenches. The fortlet was partially preserved and put on public display. Further small-scale trenching was carried out to the south of the fortlet in 2011.

DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION:

Excavations have revealed that the fortlet measured 18.5m east-to-west by 21.5m north-to-south, with its northern defences provided by the Antonine Wall Rampart and Ditch. The fortlet is of one build with the Antonine Wall Rampart, meaning that it was built at the same time and as an integrated unit. A single ditch was identified around the fortlet's east, south, and west sides, with no recognisable gap giving access to the fortlet's south entrance, or a recognisable causeway across the Antonine Wall Ditch to the north. The fortlet's entrances were lined with post-holes that may have supported gateways or towers, and a cobbled road ran through the fortlet from north to south. Two timber buildings were identified, one to either side of the road surface, and these were almost certainly small barracks to house the soldiers who were stationed here. Also uncovered within the fortlet's interior was part of a possible stairway or ladder leading up to the top of the Antonine Wall Rampart, a possible lean-to structure built up against the south side of the northern Rampart, and a deep circular pit located within the fortlet's north-west corner. The pit was 2m wide and 3m deep, and may have been a possible well or latrine pit; deposited within the pit were a number of leather shoes and almost all of a broken black burnished ware cooking pot. Other finds from the fortlet's interior included butchered cattle bones, part of a decorated bronze harness strap, an axe head, and a range of Roman pottery, all generally datable to the Antonine period. There was some evidence for modification of the fortlet during its period of occupation, including the probable demolition of its north gateway and the installation of a small hearth in the middle of the road near the gate.

Just outside the fortlet, in the corner where its east rampart met the Antonine Wall Rampart, was a small platform of about 2.3m east-to-west by 1.3m north-to-south and 0.2m high,

surrounded by a curving ditch of about 8m in length; this ditch was cut short (0.2m) of both the fortlet's east rampart and the Antonine Wall Rampart, confirming that it was secondary to both. A substantial but disturbed hearth was located just east of this ditch, and a dump of boulders close to the fortlet's east rampart provided a small causeway over the ditch and into the area of the platform. Another causeway was located in the fortlet ditch to the east, made of sandstone slabs; while this could be dated to a period after the Roman occupation, it is interpreted as probably related to the nearby corner platform. Unfortunately, the purpose of this platform remains uncertain.

The 2011 trenches to the south of the Roman fortlet were designed to investigate the road leading from the fortlet's south gate and to, hopefully, trace it to the Military Way. This revealed, however, only late eighteenth-century landscaping, and identified the known road, and presumed line of the Roman Military Way, as also of eighteenth-century construction. It is now assumed that the Military Way was not located some distance to the south of the Wall, but rather ran adjacent to it in this area.

Although Kinneil had long been identified as the probable location of an Antonine Wall fort, the discovery of the fortlet has now led many archaeologists to abandon this idea. The argument of spacing, with a fort located at approximately every two Roman miles, however, is very strongly supported by the known fort sites along the length of the Antonine Wall. If this pattern holds true, we should still expect to find an as yet undiscovered Antonine Wall fort somewhere in the vicinity of Kinneil House.

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