

Within Falkirk town centre, in an area known as “the Pleasance” immediately south of the Howgate Shopping Centre is the site of a Roman fort on the Antonine Wall. This is one of the most recent fort discoveries. The fort is now built over by houses and a bowling green. There are no traces visible on the ground today.

HISTORY OF DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION:

A fort had been suspected at Falkirk since the early eighteenth century, though it was assumed to have been built over by the late medieval and modern town. Roman building stones, hearths, and pottery fragments were all dug up south of the town centre in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, supporting the suggestion by some antiquaries that the fort had probably been located in the Pleasance of Falkirk. In the early 1900s, Sir George Macdonald

dug several trenches tracing the line of the Antonine Wall through Falkirk, including the exposure of a portion of the Rampart’s stone base in the Pleasance. A number of later excavations across the line of the Wall through Falkirk would frequently identify Roman remains, but the precise location of the fort was not discovered until 1991. Limited excavations have taken place between 1991-93, and then again between 2000-06.

DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION:

Very little of the fort at Falkirk has been identified, but ditches of both the fort or its annexe have been located. The area of the east gate is represented by three ditches with an entrance gap to the east of Pleasance Road and south of Booth Place. A cobbled roadway ran through the entrance gaps, possibly representing the Military Way as it entered the fort. Traces of timber buildings were located to the east, near the corner of Rosehall Terrace and Cow Wynd, probably within an annexe attached to the fort’s east side. Small portions of two ditches at the fort’s presumed south-west corner were identified

between South Pleasance Avenue and Hodge Street. At least six phases of occupation were identified, including a pre-Roman palisade trench, two Roman phases (one probably pre-dating the construction of the Antonine Wall), a blacksmith’s workshop from around the tenth century, and later medieval and modern occupation. Excavations between the fort and Callendar Park in 1980, just east of Kemper Avenue, revealed a stone bath-house. The large distance between the site of the fort and this bath-house remains puzzling, and is the longest known distance between a fort and bath-house anywhere on the line of the Wall.

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