

Peel Park in Kirkintilloch marks the site of a Roman fort on the Antonine Wall. Although nothing is clearly visible on the ground today, the site is well worth a visit because of the adjacent Auld Kirk Museum, and the site's history as an Antonine Wall location that was refortified in later centuries.

Within Peel Park are the visible remains of a later medieval motte (the Kirkintilloch Peel) and stone castle (Kirkintilloch Castle), which were constructed over the remains of the Antonine Wall and part of the fort during the twelfth to fourteenth centuries.

HISTORY OF DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION:

Kirkintilloch was one of the earliest places identified as the site of a Roman fort on the Antonine Wall. However, what seventeenth and eighteenth-century antiquaries originally identified as the remains of a Roman fort were actually a medieval motte (the Kirkintilloch Peel) and later stone castle (Kirkintilloch Castle), which had been built over the line of the Antonine Wall and part of the Roman fort. Writing in the 1695 edition of Gibson's Camden's Britannia, Sir Robert Sibbald described the substantial medieval remains as "the greatest fort of all" on the Antonine Wall. Despite this misidentification, the discovery of Roman building stones, coins, part of an amphora, and other artefacts in the area throughout the 1800s provided strong evidence for occupation in the Roman period. Small-scale trenching within Peel Park by Sir George Macdonald in 1914 revealed Roman period hearths, tiles, and pottery. Although clear structural traces of the fort were not available, Macdonald was confident in placing a Roman fort at Peel Park, though he acknowledged that the medieval remains

had greatly disturbed any sign of what had been left behind by the Romans.

Between 1953-61, several trenches were dug by Prof Anne Robertson on behalf of the Hunterian Museum. These revealed the stone base of the Antonine Wall Rampart and part of the Ditch in the north-west corner of Peel Park, and, in the southern half of Peel Park, the traces of roads and gutters, rows of postholes belonging to an unknown number of timber buildings, and a significant amount of Roman pottery of Antonine date. Again, while the fort's outline of defensive ramparts and ditches were not identified, the evidence clearly attested the presence of a Roman occupation at the site. Further excavations in 1975, 1978-79, and 1988-89 have provided further details that may represent portions of the fort's defences. In 2006, GUARD carried out a geophysical survey within Peel Park, including both magnetometry and resistivity.

DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION:

Based on the excavations of the 1970s and 1980s, the fort has been estimated to have an internal area of about 1.4ha (3.45 acres), extending from the area of the Auld Kirk Museum and Town Hall on the east to the western end of Peel Park, and from just north of the bandstand to just south of Union Street. A ditch that may represent the fort's south-west corner was identified in the 1975 excavations, just west of Peel Park at Union Street, while the 1978-79 excavations to the south of Union Street between the Town Hall and the church located what is probably the fort's southern defences. This ditch ran east-to-west and then featured a sharp turn to the south, probably a doubling-back at the location of the fort's south gateway to create a second line of defences on the fort's south side; excavations just south of this in 1988-89 located two more east-to-west ditches, supporting this interpretation and suggesting that the fort featured at least three ditches on the south. In the current car park near the corner of Union Street and Peel Brae, a portion of ditch was also identified with an apparent curve toward the north-east, possibly marking the fort's south-east corner. Several roughly dressed sandstone blocks were recovered from the ditch fills, suggesting that the fort's defences may have been deliberately backfilled, and indicating that at least one of the Roman buildings at Kirkintilloch had been built of stone. No clear evidence for an annexe or civilian settlement (vicus) has been identified, but it has been suggested that the southern-most ditch located south of Union Street may represent a change in the size or shape of the fort at some stage during its life or, alternatively, the defences of a small annexe attached to the fort's south side. The discovery of sandstone building blocks in the northern ditch of this area may best support this view, with the stones coming from a bath-house that was located within the annexe here.

Very few artefacts were recovered from the 1980s excavations at Kirkintilloch, but samples of the ditch fills were collected for scientific analysis. Sample material from the bottom waterlogged fills believed to represent the period of Roman occupation were subjected to plant macrofossil and pollen analysis. Cereal bran and chaff, wild seeds and fruits, wood charcoal, charred barley, and a variety of charred wild species were identified as macrofossils, and tests indicated that the material likely blew into the ditch rather than representing sewage. This material suggested that there were only low levels of local cultivation around Kirkintilloch in the Roman period. Geophysical survey within Peel Park in 2006, including both magnetometry and resistivity, identified several anomalies including a large earthwork that probably dates to the medieval period, but the results were inconclusive about the character of the Roman fort's interior.

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