

The largest fort on the Antonine Wall was located at the east end of Laurieston on the site of the former Mumrills farm. The fort is partially within a large field and partially under housing. There are no visible traces of the fort on the ground today, but subtle traces of the fort can still be seen in aerial photographs.

HISTORY OF DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION:

It was long expected that a fort was located near Mumrills, but this was not confirmed until 1912, when the son of the tenant located fragments of Roman pottery and glass as well as the foundations of a building. The Falkirk antiquary and early archaeologist Mungo Buchanan assisted with the clearance of the site, revealing the corner of the fort's headquarters building (principia) and remains of a bath-house. Later in the year, Sir George Macdonald returned to the site for further excavation. Ploughing in the following year revealed the fort's south-east corner, and Buchanan continued to investigate the site, with visits by Sir George Macdonald and Professor Francis Haverfield.

Large-scale excavations by Sir George Macdonald and Alexander Curle took place in 1923–28, revealing more complete details of the fort's defences and its interior. A further excavation campaign was carried out in 1958-60 to pursue questions remaining from the earlier work by Macdonald and Curle, and also to investigate crop-marks that had recently been identified to the east of the fort. A number of continued discoveries were made throughout the 1980s-90s during archaeological watching briefs and in chance finds within residents' gardens. Further excavations took place in 1996, small trenching in the early 2000s, and again in 2010. Geophysical survey was conducted in 2007.

DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION:

Excavations have revealed that the latest fort at Mumrills had an internal area of 2.6ha (6.5 acres), and that there were actually two separate forts on the site, with the later fort using the earlier fort as an annexe. The later fort was the largest known from the line of the Wall, and it may have had a special significance. The fort pre-dated the Antonine Wall Rampart, and was constructed of clay ramparts on stone bases. The northern rampart was 4.5m wide, fronted by the 7.2m wide Antonine Wall Ditch,

while the remaining ramparts were about 4m wide and further defended by a variable number of ditches on each side. Two ditches are known on the east, one on the south, and four on the west (with only three ditch sections north of the Military Way on the west side). A large annexe was attached to the fort's west side, re-using the space provided by the site's earlier fort.

Within the fort were found the remains of a stone headquarters building (*principia*), two granaries (*horrea*), a large commanding officer's house (*praetorium*) with its own suite of baths, a bath-house near the fort's north-east corner, and the post-holes of at least four timber buildings (probably barracks). It has been suggested that the *principia* was destroyed and reconstructed twice, being reduced in size each time. In its original phase, this building measured about 36m by 30.5m and included a veranda and rear projection, among the largest known *principia* known in Britain. The *aedes*, or shrine of the standards, was remarkably small, and there was no underground vault for storage of the regimental treasure-chest; it is suggested that the *principia* had an upper level, and that this may have served the role ordinarily played by a vault. By its final phase, the *principia* had been reduced to about 29m square. The extent and features of the commanding officer's house also suggest an unusual importance and the 1923–28 excavators suggested that the fort may have been the main command base for the entire frontier. This building measured about 42m by 33m in its later phase, but had originally been a smaller timber-built structure. Some time after the *praetorium* was expanded and rebuilt in stone, a set of private baths was added to its north side, but the evidence for multiple phasing in these and the apparent dis-use of the regimental bath-house in the fort's north-east corner may indicate that the *praetorium*'s bath suite was being used by the common soldiers during the fort's final years of occupation.

Sir George Macdonald had suggested that the early fort, located on the site of the later fort's annexe, was of Flavian date, being constructed during Agricola's campaigns around AD 80. More recently, Geoff Bailey has re-examined the evidence from both the major excavations and smaller-scale recent archaeological work to date the early fort to the early part of the Antonine period. This early Antonine fort would have been constructed in advance of the Wall's Rampart, and then replaced by a

new fort centred slightly further east around the time that work on the Rampart itself commenced. It is argued that this shift in fort location was part of a desire to have better control over both east-west and north-south communications, and that the new fort's position was better suited for this purpose.

In addition to the two Antonine period forts, there is evidence for two or three phases of activity within the later fort, including multiple surface layers and three distinct version of the fort's *principia* and *praetorium*. These phases were previously thought to indicate multiple separate occupations of the Antonine Wall, but they are now more commonly viewed as changes that occurred during a single continuous occupation.

Two inscribed stones, a tombstone and an altar, found nearby suggest the presence of two different auxiliary units at Mumrills. The altar, dedicated to Hercules Magusanus by Valerius Nigrinus, a *duplicarius* of the First Tungrian Wing, was discovered in 1841 near the bridge at Brightons, about 1.2km south-east of Mumrills (RIB 2140). The tombstone of Nectovellius, son of Vindex, a Brigantian who had served nine years with the Second Cohort of Thracians, was found near the fort (RIB 2142), indicating that this unit was probably stationed at Mumrills. A third inscription, found in a post-hole of a structure of uncertain function about 146m east of the fort, is on a partial altar to the Mother Goddesses by Cassius, who may have been a *signifer*, or standard-bearer, of a unit garrisoned at the fort (RIB 2141). Other finds include a carnelian intaglio that features the goddess Nemesis (discovered in a private garden in the area of the fort's annexe), and a sandstone fragment of a statue of Hercules, measuring 0.15m x 0.15m and representing the muscular upper torso and bearded head with a club in the right hand, which was found to the south of Polmont Road about 0.7km west of the fort. It is suggested that a shrine to Hercules may have stood nearby.

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