

At Garnhall, to the west of Castlecary, lies the site of two Roman temporary camps, a circular enclosure and possible watch-tower of uncertain date, and the beginning of a long stretch (toward the west) of visible Antonine Wall Ditch and Outer Mound. This extends across the fields of Garnhall and Tollpark up to the area of the Cumbernauld Airport, providing one of the longest continuous stretches of the Antonine Wall that can be seen on the ground today. No traces of the camps or the circular enclosure are visible on the ground.

HISTORY OF DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION:

The surviving Antonine Wall Ditch and Outer Mound through Tollpark and Garnhall was well-known to the eighteenth-century antiquaries. The south defences of a Roman temporary camp (called “Garnhall 1”) were located by aerial survey in 1952, and the camp’s northern defences were identified in 1962. A second temporary camp (called “Garnhall 2”) was also discovered from the air in the early 1960s. In 1977, excavations took place as part of consideration of proposals (never realised) to convert the Garnhall farmhouse into a museum

and visitor centre. Four separate interventions occurred on areas of the “Garnhall 1” temporary camp defences between 1989–93 in advance of separate housing developments in this area. Further excavations by David Woolliscroft between 1993–95 centred on the site of the “Garnhall 2” camp, revealing a timber structure within a ring-ditch enclosure to the south of the Antonine Wall Rampart and pitted obstacles on the Berm between the Rampart and Ditch.

DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION:

The 1977 excavations consisted of ten trenches focused on the line of the Antonine Wall and Military Way. These identified the Rampart’s stone base with intact kerbing, individual turves within the Rampart, stone cobbles and boulders lining the north and south lips of the Ditch, and a clearly identifiable dividing line within the Rampart base, interpreted as the possible change-over spot for different work-squads involved with the building of the Wall. Artefacts uncovered included a flint point, four jar

fragments of reddish-brown fabric, one amphora fragment, and three fragments of medieval green glazed wares. Excavations in the 1990s also revealed examples of pitted obstacles on the Berm, between the Antonine Wall Rampart and Ditch; this adds further evidence to similar pits identified at Callendar Park on the Antonine Wall, and at various locations along Hadrian’s Wall, suggesting that pitted obstacles may have been a regular feature all along the Wall.

The series of 1989–93 excavations have helped to clarify the outlines of the “Garnhall 1” camp, overturning some of the details as plotted on Ordnance Survey maps, and concluding that parts of the camp’s defences were destroyed by the adjacent railway embankment. The camp has been estimated as having an area of 4.5ha (11 acres), and extended to either side of the current Castlecary Road (B816) with its south-east corner lying underneath the M80. The camp could not be dated, but may have been a construction camp during the period in which the Antonine Wall was being built.

The “Garnhall 2” camp and other features were most thoroughly explored in the 1993–95 excavations. The camp is located directly south of the Antonine Wall Rampart and about 500m west of the “Garnhall 1” camp, and is estimated to have had an internal area of about 4.5ha (11 acres). While examination of aerial photographs suggested that the camp was probably earlier than the Antonine Wall, and extended both north and south of the line of the Rampart, excavations have failed to identify a continuation of the camp to the north of the Antonine Wall. Indeed, evidence that the camp’s ditches cut through portions of turf that had either slipped from the Antonine Wall Rampart or was part of a designed turf platform, confirm that the camp was built after the Antonine Wall. This also suggests that the camp was probably long and narrow, using the Antonine Wall Rampart as its own northern defence. Within the area of this camp was found a circular enclosure or ring-ditch, which appears to have been dug before the Antonine Wall. Within this enclosure were found evidence of timber structures, a metallised surface, a stone hearth, and pieces of Roman glass. Radiocarbon dates from the

hearth range from 210 BC to AD 60, suggesting that the enclosure was probably part of a pre-Roman occupation at Garnhall. The excavators, however, have suggested that a square Roman watch-tower was placed within the Iron Age ring-ditch around the time of the Antonine Wall, and that this may have been used as part of a signalling system, with the location providing the only known spot that would have been visible from both of the adjacent forts at Castlecary and Westerwood.

The excavations at Garnhall have raised more questions than they have provided answers. The area appears to have been used for a number of purposes before, during, and after the building of the Antonine Wall. The precise dating, purposes, and relationships between the two Garnhall temporary camps and the nearby Tollpark camp remain uncertain, as are their relationships to the Antonine Wall. At least one of these camps was probably used during the construction of the frontier, but Garnhall 2 appears to have served a different purpose sometime after the Wall was completed. It is possible that the Garnhall 2 camp was part of a campaign to repair portions of the Wall, or that it was of even later date.

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