

TENTFIELD: EAST AND WEST EXPANSIONS

In the wooded area to the south of the Falkirk Wheel, between Watling Lodge and Rough Castle, are the remains of two “expansions” attached to the south face of the Antonine Wall Rampart. Called Tentfield East and West, the eastern-most “expansion” is located just north of Bonnyhill Road and opposite the entrance to Rowan Crescent, while Tentfield West lies within the woods between the Falkirk Wheel and Rough Castle fort near an electrical pylon.

The line of the Antonine Wall Rampart, Ditch, and Outer Mound are still visible between the “expansions”, but they are obscured by trees. Both “expansions” are slightly visible, but they are difficult to distinguish on the ground. Another pair of “expansions”, in a better state of preservation, are located to the west of Rough Castle.

HISTORY OF DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION:

The Tentfield “expansions” appear to have escaped the notice of all the antiquaries except for Alexander Gordon and General William Roy. Gordon called the western example an “exploratory turret” and the eastern one a “Watch-Tower,” while Roy includes a feature called “Gilmor Seat Castellum or Turret” in his

plan and table of measurements at the approximate location of Tentfield West. Both features were recorded by Sir George Macdonald but neither have been excavated. Other examples of “expansions” at Bonnyside East and Croy Hill, however, were excavated in the 1890s, 1957, and 1967.

DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION:

The Tentfield expansions have both been described as roughly semi-circular in shape, with Tentfield East measuring about 9.7m by 5.5m and surviving to a height of about 1m, while Tentfield West measures about 8m by 7m and survives to a height of about 1.3m. Most other “expansions” along the Wall were also originally described as semi-circular, but were revealed by excavations to be square, composed of turf, and built upon a stone base or natural rock. In the 1930s, Sir George Macdonald interpreted these “expansions”,

along with those at Croy Hill and Bonnyside, as beacon or signalling platforms. Excavation of Bonnyside East has provided the most detailed description of this class of installations. There, traces of burnt material were revealed around the “expansion”, lending support to the beacon platform interpretation. They may alternatively, however, have served a turret-like function, facilitating communication from east-to-west.

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