

I.

THE ROMAN FORT AT FENDOCH IN GLENALMOND: A PRELIMINARY NOTE. BY I. A. RICHMOND, M.A., F.S.A.Scot., AND JAMES MCINTYRE.

(a) INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

The Roman site at Fendoch was not unknown to an older generation, though to this one it comes as a new discovery. It was first mentioned in print by the minister of Monzie, who was responsible for the section dealing with the parish in the *Statistical Account of Scotland* (1795). "About two miles east from the church" (of Monzie), he wrote,¹ "at the country called F'indochs, there is a large camp. It is situated opposite to the only proper passage through the hills found in them, for about 40 miles: it stands on a high ground defended by waters on two sides, and a moss with steep ground on the others. The trenches are still entire, and in some places 6 feet deep. It is about 180 paces in length, and 80 paces in breadth, and was surrounded by a strong earthen wall, part of which still remains, and is near 12 feet

¹ *Op. cit.*, vol. xv. p. 256.

thick." This account is quoted by Chalmers, almost word for word:¹ but something was added to it by him in another connection. In dealing with the Roman roads of Scotland he quotes a letter on "vicinal ways" from Colonel Shand, who observed that "there is one way of this kind twelve feet wide, which I have traced, and which is in some places very distinct, from the confluence of the Powaffray-water with the river Earn, near Strageth, where the great Roman road crosses the Earn, through the country northward to the plantations of Monzie, where there is the vestige of a strong post in Roman style, from which post this vicinal way turned to the right; and I was told by some of the country people that it may still be seen in a few places running on past Connachan to the Roman camp at East Findoch. This camp contains, as usual, about 90 acres Scots measure, and is advantageously situated at the mouth of Glenalmond."² The letter is dated 22nd December 1801. But Sir George Macdonald tells us that in a paper read to a Perthshire Society thirteen years before (26th February 1788), the MS. of which is now in the Perth Museum, Shand had referred to the forts "at Dialgen-Ross on the Erne, and Fiante-Ach in the opening of the Defile of Glen-Almond" as Roman, unfortunately without giving any detailed description. Dealginross was, of course, known to Gordon, but it is more than likely that Shand was the discoverer of Fendoch.

Before dealing with the passages we have quoted, it will be well to note that the minister of Monzie also observed, on a narrower plateau lying to the north of the site which he believed Roman, a native work, irregular in plan. Further, the croft of East Findoch stood upon the Roman site—its ruins are visible to-day; and Stobie's *Map of Perthshire* (1811), marking clearly both sites, shows that the croft had already obliterated the west end of the supposedly Roman earthwork. In fact, the clear indications noted in the older *Statistical Account* were steadily disappearing under cultivation. This explains why, in the *New Statistical Account*, no emphasis was laid upon the site known to the minister and the colonel, though a Roman *denarius* was added to the record. Meanwhile, too, another discovery had taken place which drew all the attention of a relic-loving age to the native site. In 1834, men building a stone wall (now ruinous) across the irregular enclosure, discovered three bronze cauldrons full of objects.³ These antiquities were promptly dispersed, and have never been traced since. No doubt

¹ *Caled. Rom.*, vol. i. p. 173.

² *Ibid.*, p. 146. For some account of Shand and his activities, see *Proceedings*, vol. vii. (1866), pp. 26 ff.

³ *New Statistical Account*, Perth, vol. x. p. 262.

they formed a group like the Carlingwark Loch hoard, of the late Iron Age. The spectacular nature of the discovery led, not unnaturally, to the complete eclipse of the second site. On the Ordnance Map the name of Roman camp was transferred to the northern plateau, and as these earthworks too became indistinct—they are now scarcely visible to an untrained eye—inquirers were led still farther afield. Dr Christison planned only some crofts, situated still farther north on the river-terrace of the Almond, and very rightly impugned their Roman nature.¹

Turning now to the present day, the writers of this paper, making a tour of Roman Scotland in 1935, happened upon the account of Fendoch in the *New Statistical Account*, put at their disposal in the public library of Perth. They were attracted to the site less by the finding of the cauldrons, than by the record of the Roman coin noted above. But Fendoch is an obscure place to folk from south of the Cheviot, and we were to learn how to find it through an after-dinner conversation with Mrs H. G. Donald, a daughter of Dr Temple of Comrie, at that moment re-visiting her home from Bishop Auckland. Only then did the significance of the position dawn upon us, as upon earlier observers, whose works we did not then know. It seemed to us that, if the Romans had pushed out forts to block such positions as Comrie, the mouth of the more significant Sma' Glen would not have escaped the attention of their tacticians.

On reaching the site, in the early evening, it was immediately apparent that the northern plateau, by this time established as the traditional site, could not have held a Roman fort: it is too irregular and narrow. Our eyes then wandered southwards, to the tableland of East Fendoch, where the low sun was accentuating the even platform of the second earthwork. A rapid inspection showed the spread remains of the rampart, with rounded angles, and, at the south-east and south-west angles, clear traces of a ditch. The position was a typically Roman choice, reminding us very strongly of Brough-by-Bainbridge, the Flavian site in Wensleydale; and there was little doubt in our minds that we had found a Roman site.

The next step was to test the field observations by some trial trenches. A call upon the tenant of the land, Captain Ian Macrae of Fendoch (the old Fendoch West), assured us of a ready welcome, and our application to Captain Drummond-Moray, of Abercairney, the proprietor, was equally kindly received. Our Society made a grant of twenty pounds towards the work, of which just under ten were actually used in trenching conducted by the first writer after Easter, 1936. Eleven

¹ *Early Fortifications in Scotland*, p. 921.

days' digging was sufficient to gain a fair idea of the possibilities of the site.

(b) DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE.

The site is a flat-topped rather narrow moraine of gravel and soft sands at the mouth of the Sma' Glen, the last of a series which runs along the bed of the broad, dry valley in which the Fendoch Burn meanders. It is just large enough to contain the Roman site, whose dimensions, 598 feet by 332 feet, are adjusted to fit it. The Fendoch Burn runs in a steep gorge to the south: on the north a nameless streamlet drains a bog to the west: both streams unite in low bogland to the east, and join the Almond above Buchanty. The main outlook is to the north, up the Glen: but from a tower at the fort it would be possible to see considerably further to east and west than now. The southward vista is completely blocked, and indeed dominated, by the great hill of Stroness. Access to the site is difficult. From the west, it can be reached by a neck of the moraine skirting the west bog: and this line of moraines has in fact been used to carry an old road. The same line seems to have been continued eastwards through the bogland and across the Almond. Neither northwards nor southwards are communications invited.

(c) THE DEFENCES.

The defences consist of a turf rampart, over 20¹ feet thick, and a single ditch, 13 feet wide and about 6 feet deep, separated from the rampart by a 5-foot berm. On the east, where an irregular extension of the plateau might offer a footing to an enemy, there are two ditches of similar dimensions, about 6 feet apart. Elsewhere, the ditch occupies the very edge of the plateau: indeed, it is clear that a long portion of the southward ditch has at some time gathered too much water and slipped away. There was no opportunity to see whether there had been angle towers or interval towers, and the only gateway-position identified was that of the east gate, in the centre of the east side. A corresponding gateway may be inferred at the west. If there were north or south gateways, the visible remains of unbroken rampart suggest that they must have lain west of the short axis, but their existence remains unproven. The existence of the east gateway was proved by finding a cobbled road at the central point on the line of the rampart.

That the turf rampart had not been the first defence of the site was proved by finding, at two points below it, towards the west end of the

¹ If the minister's "12," in the *Statistical Account* (*loc. cit.*), were a misprint for "21," it would be in harmony with the actual remains.

south side, a deep palisade trench, filled with fragments of wood, upon which a report is given below by Dr A. Raistrick, of Armstrong College, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. This trench, after lying derelict for a while, had been purposely filled up before the rampart was made. It is reminiscent of the early trenches at Ardoch, Mumrills, and Croy Hill, and doubtless belongs to the earliest occupation of the site, before a permanent work had been placed there. The fact that the trench did not appear either in our sections on the west side or at the east end of the south side suggests, however, that the earlier work did not have the same plan as the later. This is a problem which further application of the spade may be expected to solve.

(d) INTERNAL BUILDINGS.

Examination of the internal buildings was confined to the south-east division of the fort. Two cooking-ovens, however, were noted, just north of the south-east and south-west angles respectively, at the back of the rampart. They were much ruined, and no attempt was made to uncover them completely; but they had been well used, and the heavily burnt stones were set in a prepared mass of puddled clay. Much ash bestrewed the ground in front of them.

The buildings had been of timber. Cross-trenching rapidly picked up a sleeper-beam trench, well defined in the gravel soil, which was traced for some 120 feet. It had held a beam at least 1 foot square, and thus represented a substantial structure. Towards the west end, however, it was noted that the sleeper track had been cut through in three places by post-holes, which impinged more and more upon its line as this was followed westward. Their irregularity in relation to the beam trench precludes the idea that they belong to the same period as the trench; and it would seem that they belong to a later reconstruction, on almost the same lines. This agrees with another feature of the sleeper trench which was not empty, but well filled with occupation-earth and pottery rather than silt; a state of affairs which is comprehensible if sleeper beams had been withdrawn and the trench filled up with scattered rubbish in process of a reconstruction. The pottery itself was mostly coarse ware, fragments of *amphoræ* and jars, although a fine piece of Samian ware, of Dragendorff's shape 29, was welcome evidence for a Flavian date; and the amount recovered was suggestive of a heavy occupation. The sleeper trench described was the only one followed in detail, but cross-trenching revealed three more between it and the south rampart, and no more for some distance to the north.

The trenches may represent two parallel buildings, barracks or stables, about 15 and 30 feet wide respectively, separated by an interval of 9 feet, representing a street or alley. The southernmost building lies 12 feet behind the rampart, an interval matching the end of the trench ascertained on the east. It is very clear that systematic trenching would quickly recover the plan of the timber buildings.

(e) CONCLUSIONS.

No sign whatever was noted of stone buildings, and no Antonine pottery was recovered. Both these points would suggest that the occupation of the site was wholly early, as has been thought of that at Inchtuthil. If this is so, the fort is one of the few in Scotland which are free from the complication of an Antonine reconstruction, and at the same time completely accessible to the excavator. It would seem to offer an exceptional opportunity not only of checking results already obtained, but also of adding to our knowledge of the earlier Roman hold upon Scotland. Since Sir George Macdonald's brilliant reconsideration of the structural evidence about the Agricolan occupation (*J.R.S.*, vol. ix. p. 132), it has been a matter of common knowledge that the permanent organisation following that invasion was a great deal more thorough and more soundly conceived than had been thought. The discovery of this new fort seems to confirm that view in a remarkable fashion, as a further consideration of its position will show.

Fendoch fort lies upon a natural transverse route between Glenalmond and the south-west. Hitherto, it has been thought that the only Roman outpost in this direction was Dealgin Ross, an interesting and complicated site, dated to the Flavian age by coin finds. But Fendoch lies upon the direct route between Dealgin Ross and "Bertha." There can thus be no doubt that Roman troops often used this natural corridor. The report of Colonel Shand further suggests that in fact they provided it with a road, coming westwards from Monzie by Connachan. If, however, the object of this road was to come from Strageath to Fendoch, there is no need to go to Monzie: and we are entitled to suggest that his turn in the line, above Monzie, was not merely a right-angled turn, but a T-junction, where a larger main cross-road from Fendoch to Dealgin Ross was joined by the minor 12-foot feeder from Strageath. Nor can it be regarded as certain that the transverse line of road towards the south-west necessarily stopped at Dealgin Ross. On that site to-day there are clear signs of a great road leading south-eastwards, either down Strathearn, or back over the

natural pass to Ardoch. But there is also a causeway leading out of the fort south-westwards, up Glenartney: and Sir George Macdonald has discovered an anonymous plan of the site, made when the remains were less indistinct than now, which shows this as a prominent roadway, metalled and kerbed. The route up the glen and over the hills to Callander is not now organised as a motor road; but it is a traditional pass, marked on Stobie's map of Perthshire. It is no worse, if as bad, as the principal Roman lines of penetration through the Lake District further south. Are we then to recognise, in the new fort at Fendoch and the half-forgotten traces of a road-system connecting it and Dealgin Ross with the south and south-west, a complement to the main line of penetration by Ardoch and Strageath? It is at least a logical complement. Fendoch and Dealgin Ross both do what no fort further south can effect: they block up the Highland gates, and prevent all access to the southern plains. Whoever planted them was following a policy like the modern British on the north-western frontier of India, achieving a stranglehold upon the hill-folk with greater thoroughness than has yet been realised. Developed upon these lines, the Agricolan permanent scheme, however long it lasted, would gain welcome coherence and vigour. Nor is it at all likely that the discovery here recorded and now ripe for development is the only one to be made. Field-work, combined with a knowledge of past records and tested by excavation, may yet have much to teach us.

(f) PRELIMINARY NOTE UPON EARTH-SAMPLES FROM FENDOCH.

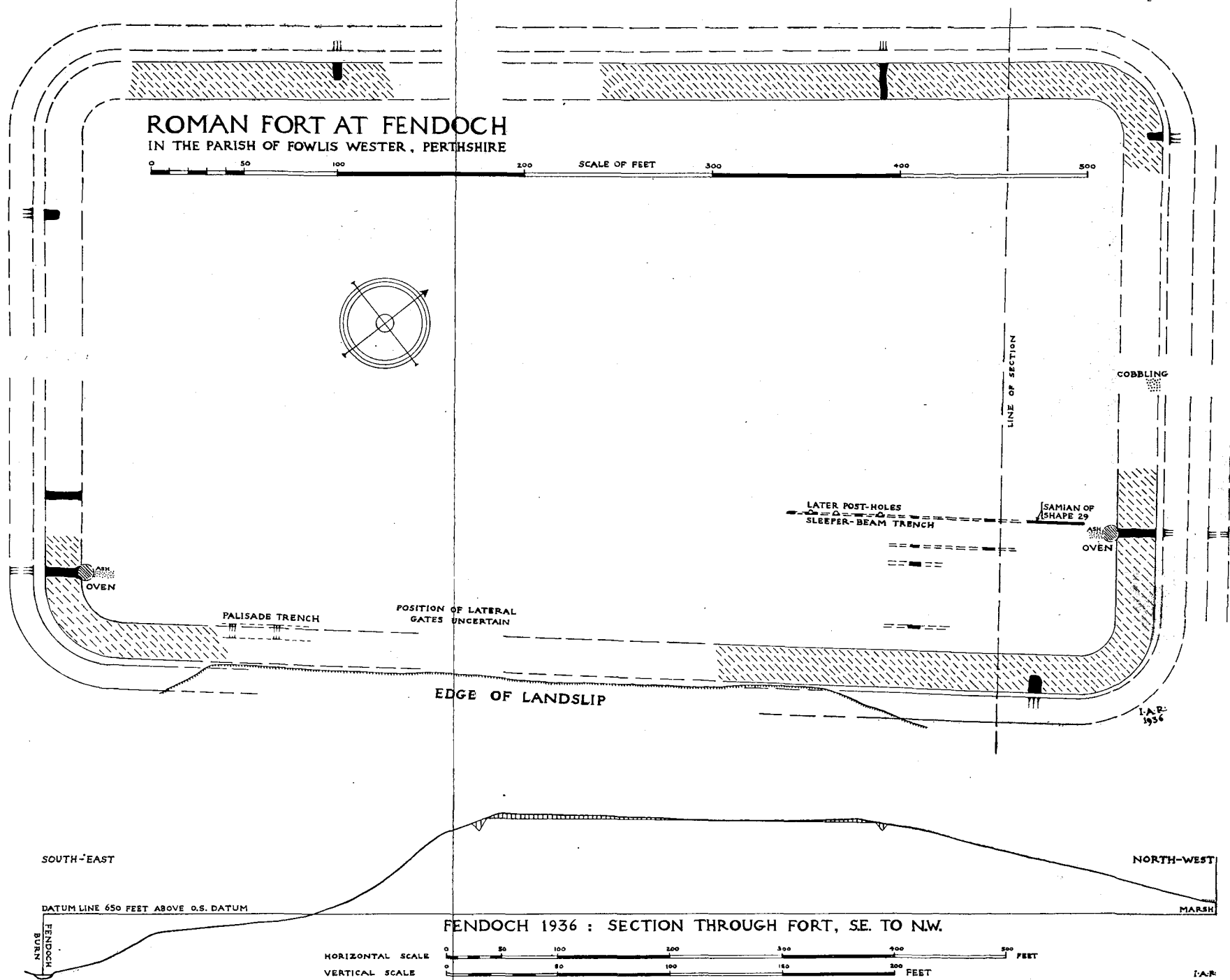
By DR A. RAISTRICK.

1. *Sample from Turf-rampart.*—This is a real turf-soil material with a very small percentage of pollen, about equally grass-spores and hazel-alder pollen. The sparseness of the pollen suggests at most fairly open scrub in the immediate vicinity, probably mainly grass land with occasional hazel or alder.

2. *Sample from Early Ditch, or Palisade-trench.*—There is a small quantity of peaty matter, and some traces of wood-fragments and leaf-mould, none of them identifiable.

3. *Sample from Early Ditch or Palisade-trench.*—A sandy clay, almost devoid of organic matter: of very fine grain matrix with much coarse sand washed in, so possibly of fairly quick accumulation.

It may be commented that while the first sample gives us suggestion of an open countryside devoid of large trees, the second and third samples attest a rapid silting of the palisade-trench after its disuse.



Roman Fort at Fendoch : Plan and Section.

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PLATE II.

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