

#### 4. EXCAVATIONS ON THE ANTONINE WALL IN POLMONT PARK AND AT DEAN HOUSE IN 1960

ON the recommendation of the Antonine Wall Committee, the following two emergency excavations were sponsored by the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate of the Ministry of Works in 1960.

##### 1. *Polmont Park*

A projected trunk road from Edinburgh to Bridge of Allan will, if carried out, cut a broad swathe through the line of the Antonine Wall in Polmont Park, one mile east of Mumrills, and a limited excavation was accordingly undertaken under the direction of our Fellow, Mr J. H. Hendrie, M.I.MECH.E., to ascertain the state of the Rampart in this sector and to search for a possible mile-fortlet. The park is a quarter of a mile in length and although there are now no surface indications of the Wall, the Ditch being for the most part overlaid by the road known as Cadger's Brae, Macdonald was able to trace its course from one end to the other in 1913 by trenches cut at intervals.<sup>1</sup> In 1960 this process was repeated, the work being greatly accelerated by the employment of a mechanical excavator to remove the overburden.

It was consoling to find that except for a distance of about 100 yards at either end of the park, where the remains are not likely to be disturbed by the projected road, the Rampart, including the stone foundation, has already been completely removed in course of cultivation. Attention could therefore be concentrated on the surviving remains, and a section 20 feet west of the cemetery wall that bounds the eastern end of the park disclosed that the stone foundation, 15 feet in width, was virtually intact at this point. It had however settled unequally in the sandy subsoil, so that whereas the kerb-stones were only one inch below the present surface at the north-west corner of the trench, they were 2 feet 7 inches below at the south-east corner. Masons' chippings packed in behind the kerb-stones showed that the latter had been hammer-dressed on the spot, and the core was composed of a single layer of water-worn cobbles 6-8 inches in thickness. What little remained of the superstructure consisted of the natural sandy subsoil with the random addition of a few turves: how this was revetted was not clear, but clay had certainly not been used since none was found either on the stones or in the interstices between them. To the west of this section the foundation was traced for a further 100 yards by means of trenches across the south kerb, the last surviving remains occurring at the point where the Rampart leaves the crest of the knoll which it has occupied since emerging from the cemetery and begins the descent to lower ground. In one trench distinct traces of a turf cheek were observed over the kerb-stones, and although the superstructure had not survived in the other trenches there was again no evidence for the use of clay. The course of the Rampart in

<sup>1</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, XLIX (1914-15), 135. O.S. 25-inch map NS 9379.

this sector proved to be not quite accurately represented on the O.S. map, the true course being as indicated on the map illustrating Macdonald's survey of 1913.<sup>1</sup>

The slight elevation traversed by the stretch of Rampart just described affords a commanding view to the north, and since it is almost equidistant between the forts of Inveravon and Mumrills it seemed possible that it might be the site of a mile-fortlet similar to those discovered from the air at Wilderness Plantation<sup>2</sup> and Glasgow Bridge.<sup>3</sup> But although this hypothesis received some encouragement from anomalies registered in the area by both resistivity and magnetometer surveys, a trench cut by the mechanical excavator from the cemetery wall westwards for 110 yards, parallel with the Rampart and 20 feet to the south of it, yielded completely negative results. Throughout the trench undisturbed sand was found immediately below the turf, and it seems probable therefore that if a mile-fortlet existed hereabouts it lay further east. The most likely position is, in fact, in the immediate vicinity of the old church at Polmont which is closer than Polmont Park to the mid-point between Inveravon and Mumrills, and from which there is an equally open outlook to the north.

At the western end of the park some scattered traces of the Rampart foundation were found on the O.S. line 100 yards east of the junction between the farm road from Polmont Park and Cadger's Brae, and a complete section of the foundation was exposed, at a depth of 2 feet below the present surface, 100 feet east of the same junction. The Rampart itself was standing to a height of 10 inches and consisted of a core of dark-brown sandy loam which was faced on the north side by laid turf 2 feet 9 inches broad. A corresponding facing of turfwork had no doubt existed on the south side also, but had been destroyed in recent times by the construction of a tile drain. The principal result of the Polmont Park excavation was thus to disprove Macdonald's assertion that throughout the initial 10 miles, from the Forth to Watling Lodge, the Rampart was built wholly or largely of clay.<sup>4</sup> Further evidence bearing on this problem was discovered at Mumrills in 1960, and the whole question is reconsidered on pp. 94 ff of the present volume.

## 2. *Dean House*

On the grounds of spacing it is reasonable to suppose that there must have been a fort at Kinneil, 2 miles from the eastern end of the Antonine Wall. But the site has never been located and there are two equally possible positions for it. One of these is in the immediate vicinity of Kinneil House, while the other, which was preferred by Macdonald,<sup>5</sup> lies some 500 yards further east, on the east bank of the Dean (or Gil) Burn and within the policies of the former mansion of Dean.

In 1959 Dean House was destroyed by fire and demolished, and West Lothian County Council, the owners of the land, kindly agreed to allow excavation in the policies for the purposes of checking the course of the Antonine Wall and testing for the existence of a fort. Labour and equipment were generously made available by Mr James Stuart, the County Road Surveyor for West Lothian, and the work was directed in the first instance by Mr Gordon Maxwell, and subsequently by our Fellow, Mr J. C. Wallace.

The Ditch of the Antonine Wall was discovered 40 yards east of the site of the house, within the limits indicated for it on the O.S. 25-inch map. It was not completely sectioned, but sufficient was uncovered to show that it measured only about 18 feet across, or half the normal width. Over it was 4 feet of humus, much of which had probably been dumped

<sup>1</sup> loc. cit., Pl. IV.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, XLV (1955), 86.

<sup>4</sup> *The Roman Wall in Scotland*, 2nd edn., 86-87.

<sup>3</sup> *Journal of Roman Studies*, XLI (1951), 61.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, 191-2.

there during the process of levelling the ground for the building of Dean House. Further south this same levelling had however removed all traces of the Rampart, and of any adjacent remains for a distance of some 60 feet behind it, by lowering the surface of the ground by as much as 8 feet. Nevertheless, if a fort had existed on this site it should still be possible to detect its south-west corner on the summit of the wooded bluff that lies in the angle between the drive and Dean Glen; and a trench, some 50 yards in length, was therefore cut from east-south-east to west-north-west across the area in the hope of intersecting the western defences. No signs of such defences, nor any other indications of a Roman fort, were however encountered, and search must now be focused on the alternative site at Kinneil House.

K. A. STEER