

# The Roman temporary camp at Auchtermuchty, Fife

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with contributions by D W Hall & D P Gallagher

## ABSTRACT

*In a watching brief a ditch of Roman type was revealed. No dating evidence was recovered.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Roman temporary camp to the east of Auchtermuchty (NO 242 118) was detected as a cropmark (illus 1). St Joseph (1965, 82) described the site as follows:

The whole of the south-east side, with central gate, and sectors of each of the other three sides, together with the rounded south and east angles were recorded. The axial dimensions of the camp are approximately 1300 ft (369 m) by 2000ft (609 m), an area of about 60 acres. A section dug across the south-east side, just to the west of the gate, revealed a typically Roman V-shaped ditch, 9 ft wide and 5 ft deep (3 x 1.7 m) to the bottom of its drainage channel.

In September 1988, the site was threatened by the proposed installation of a storm-water drain to service a housing development under construction on the north side of the A91 Auchtermuchty/Cupar Road. This involved the digging of a trench, 1 m wide, running downhill from the south side of the Cupar Road, into a nearby burn (illus 2). The intended line of the trench cut the south-east boundary of the camp, and an area of cropmarked features, visible in the interior of the camp. These additional cropmarked features had been provisionally interpreted by RCAHMS as a possible unenclosed settlement with souterrains. In the light of this, Fife Regional Council made funds available for a watching brief of the machine-cut trench, followed by limited excavation of the internal cropmarked features. Excavation and writing up was organized by Historic Buildings & Monuments.

## WATCHING BRIEF AND EXCAVATION

During the watching brief, two features were noted and interpreted as ditches (illus 2). Ditch 1, which was interpreted as the south-eastern boundary of the Roman camp, was V-shaped, 3 m wide by c 1 m deep. Ditch 2, which was located within the interior of the camp, was straight-sided and flat-bottomed, and measured 1.7 m wide by 0.4 m deep. Both ditches were aligned SE/NW and both had homogenous fills. The V-shaped ditch was filled with a dark brown, silty clay. The second ditch was filled with a grey brown silty loam with stones, gravel, and occasional black flecks. Both features were cut into the sand, gravel and clay subsoil, which, in this area, was sealed by two levels of ploughsoil up to 0.6 m in depth.

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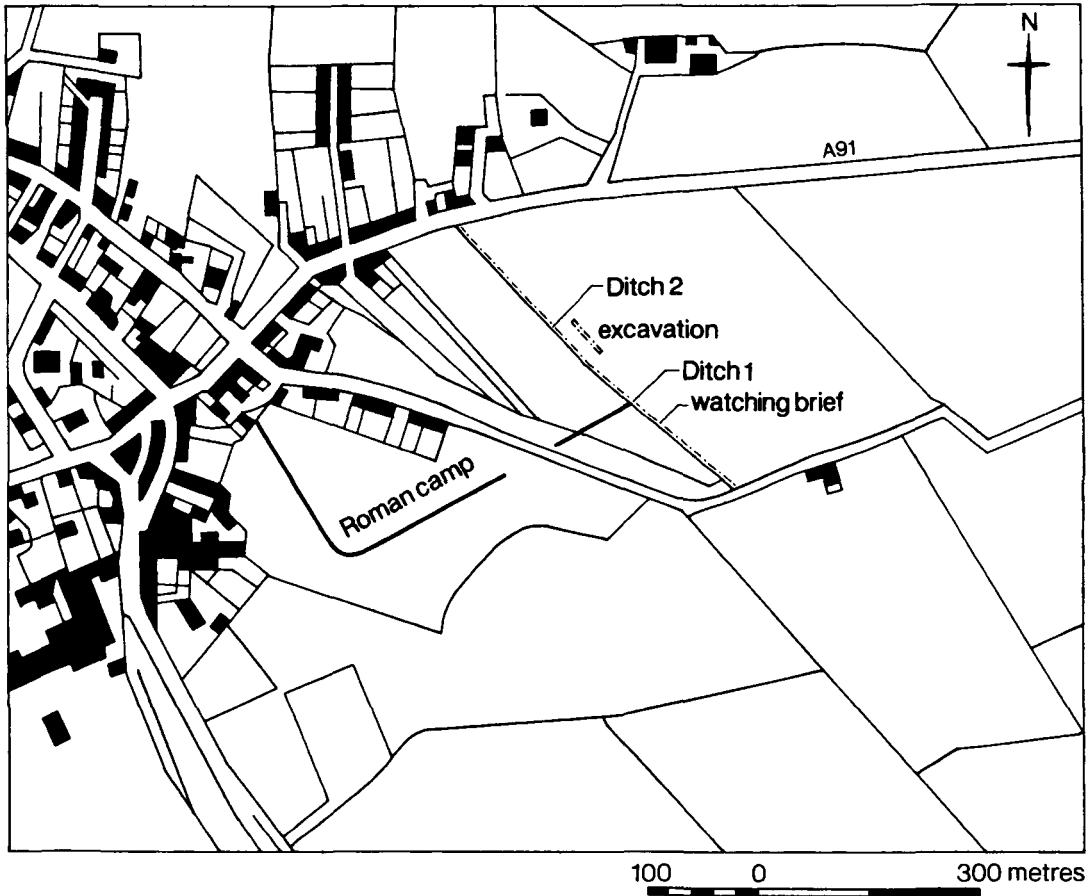


ILLUS 1 Aerial photograph of the Roman temporary camp at Auchtermuchty, Fife.  
 (Copyright: Cambridge University Collection of Air Photographs;  
 Ref: CUCAP AKC 62)

There were no contexted finds from these features, although a stone ball was retrieved from the top level of ploughsoil, outwith the area of the camp.

An area measuring 4 x 40 m was opened up to examine the internal cropmarked features (illus 2). It was positioned c 20 m east of the line of the drain to allow for machine access to the drain. Four features were found within this area: (1) a modern stone field drain, which was not excavated; (2) a large amorphous feature, which was also not fully excavated and which was cut by the modern field drain; (3) and (4) two interconnecting pits. One of the pits (F 10) was circular, 1.5 m in diameter and 0.43 m deep; the other (F 12) was rectangular, 2.5 m long, 1 m wide and 0.6 m deep. Both were filled with brown loam with small stones and gravel, and contained tiny fragments of coal. Slight differences were noted between the fills of the pits but the evidence was insufficient to determine which of the two was earlier. All features in this area were again cut into the subsoil which lay directly beneath 0.3 m of modern plough soil.

Medieval pottery and post-medieval clay pipe stems were retrieved from the bottom of the



ILLUS 2 Location Plan. Based upon the Ordnance Survey map © Crown copyright

rectangular pit while similar artefacts, as well as sherds of modern decorated china and a fragment of flint, were retrieved from the top of the fill of the large amorphous feature.

## THE FINDS

### MEDIEVAL POTTERY

Derek W Hall

The medieval pottery assemblage comprises seven bodysherds from the fill of the rectangular pit. Six of the sherds are Scottish East Coast white gritty ware and the seventh is a red sandy fabric similar to Perth local ware. The white gritty bodysherds may derive from jugs although they are too small to allow positive vessel form identification. They all belong to the identified white gritty tradition in terms of fabric and form and may be products of the Fife industry. The sherd of possible Perth local ware is from a glazed jug of a type produced in the late 15th/early 16th centuries prior to the onset of the reduced greyware industry.

### CLAY PIPES

D B Gallagher

Two stems were examined from this site. These were from two different pipes, both high-quality products of a probable late 17th-century date: (1) burnished stem fragment, stem bore 8/64 in.; and (2) burnished stem fragment, stem bore 6/64 in., with a faint impression of a roller stamp having W HINDSHA (w) within traces of a decorative border (illus 3).

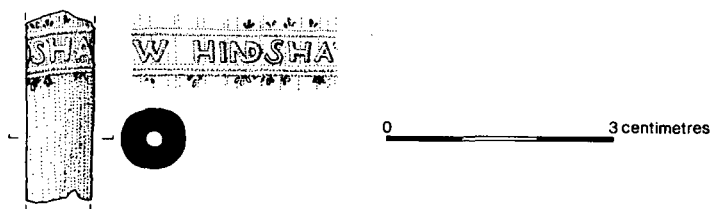
Number 2 is a product of the Glasgow pipemaker William Hyndshaw (Hindshaw) who is the first documented as a pipemaker in 1674. In 1699 he was supplying pipes to the Company of Scotland for their second expedition to Darien (Gallagher 1987a, 40; 1987b, 237). William Hyndshaw was one of the major Scottish pipemakers of the late 17th century, although few finds of his pipes have been recorded, unlike those of the contemporary Glasgow maker, James Colquhoun.

### STONE BALL

Spherical stone ball 36 mm in diameter, shaped by pecking and rubbing; 57g.

## DISCUSSION

Auchtermuchty Roman camp has been classified as a '63-acre' camp (St Joseph 1969, 116). This class of camp is attributed to the campaigns of the Emperor Septimius Severus and his son Caracalla, AD 208 and AD 210. Auchtermuchty lies on the suggested route Severus took through



ILLUS 3 Pipe-stem fragment and detail of roller-stamped inscription

Fife, from the Firth of Forth at Queensferry to the River Tay at Carpow (Reed 1976). The excavation, however, provided no information concerning the date of the site.

The excavated features within the camp interior seem to relate to the cropmarks noted by RCAHMS on aerial photographs, with the exception of Ditch 2, discovered during the watching brief. It is possible that this feature may, in fact, represent a linear pit similar to the rectangular pit. The fills of these two features are similar. The artefacts retrieved were post-medieval and therefore bear no relationship to the Roman occupation of the site. The clay pipe assemblage dates the pits to no earlier than the 17th century. The pits possibly represent rubbish pits and/or the remnants of quarrying for the sand and gravel subsoil. There is no evidence to support the original interpretation of the cropmarked features as an unenclosed settlement and souterrains.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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