

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location

Situated on a whinstone (quartz-dolerite) ridge overlooking the Kelvin valley to the north at a height of *c* 126m above sea level, the Roman fort at Croy Hill occupies one of the highest points on the line of the Antonine Wall (Illus 1.1). During the course of the excavations the hillside was contour-surveyed at 1m intervals to provide topographical background for the mapping and interpretation of the site as a whole (Illus 1.2).¹ The fort is located at the eastern end of a small plateau on the east side of the summit of the hill (Illus 1.3 and 1.4). The natural attractiveness of this sheltered location is confirmed by the fact that the fort site is directly overlain by the ruins of a small farmstead, whose existence goes back at least to the early 18th century, as it is referred to by Gordon (1726: 56) and recorded on Roy's *Military Survey of Scotland 1747–1755*. An early medieval radiocarbon date from a fragment of bone in the fill of a pit suggests that post-Roman cultivation of the hillside goes back even further (see Section 7). This longevity of superimposed occupation and associated cultivation may account for the poor preservation of the fort, as no remains are now visible on the ground. Indeed, during the course of the excavations around it, the evidence of ploughing was readily apparent in the form of scarring on boulders and plough marks in the subsoil, which had resulted in the frequent truncation of archaeological remains. Thus, the fragile remains of the turf rampart of the Wall itself in the immediate vicinity of the fort have been lost to cultivation over the centuries. However, the line of the frontier is clearly demarcated by the well-preserved ditch and upcast mound to the north, the latter surviving well because it was formed primarily of hard quartz-dolerite won from digging the former.

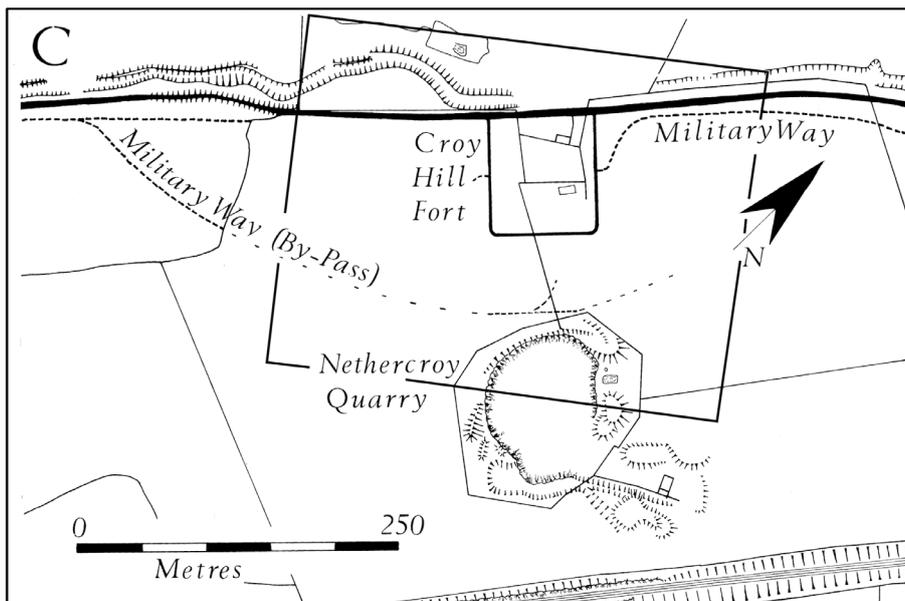
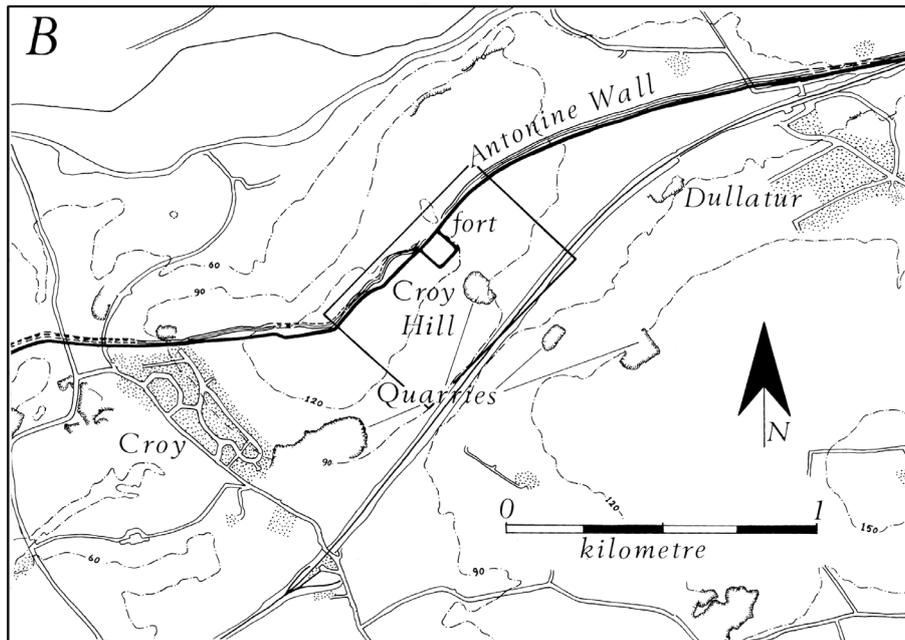
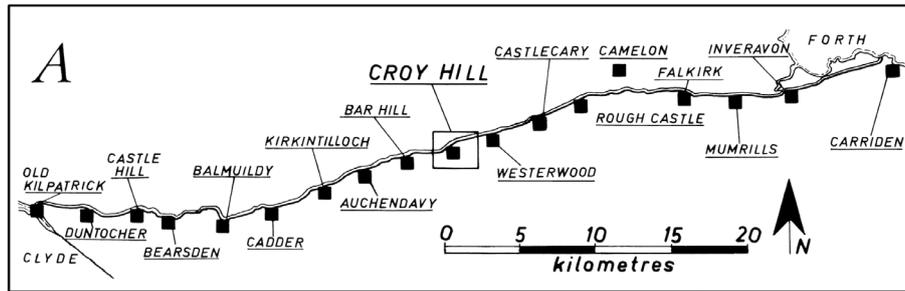
1.2 Previous archaeological records

Brief reference to the existence of a Roman fort on Croy Hill appears in various antiquarian accounts from the later 17th and early 18th centuries. Thus, Irvine notes a fort there, the relevant papers recorded by Sibbald (1707: 28, quoted in Keppie 2012: 43), as do both Stukeley, who places it on his map of the

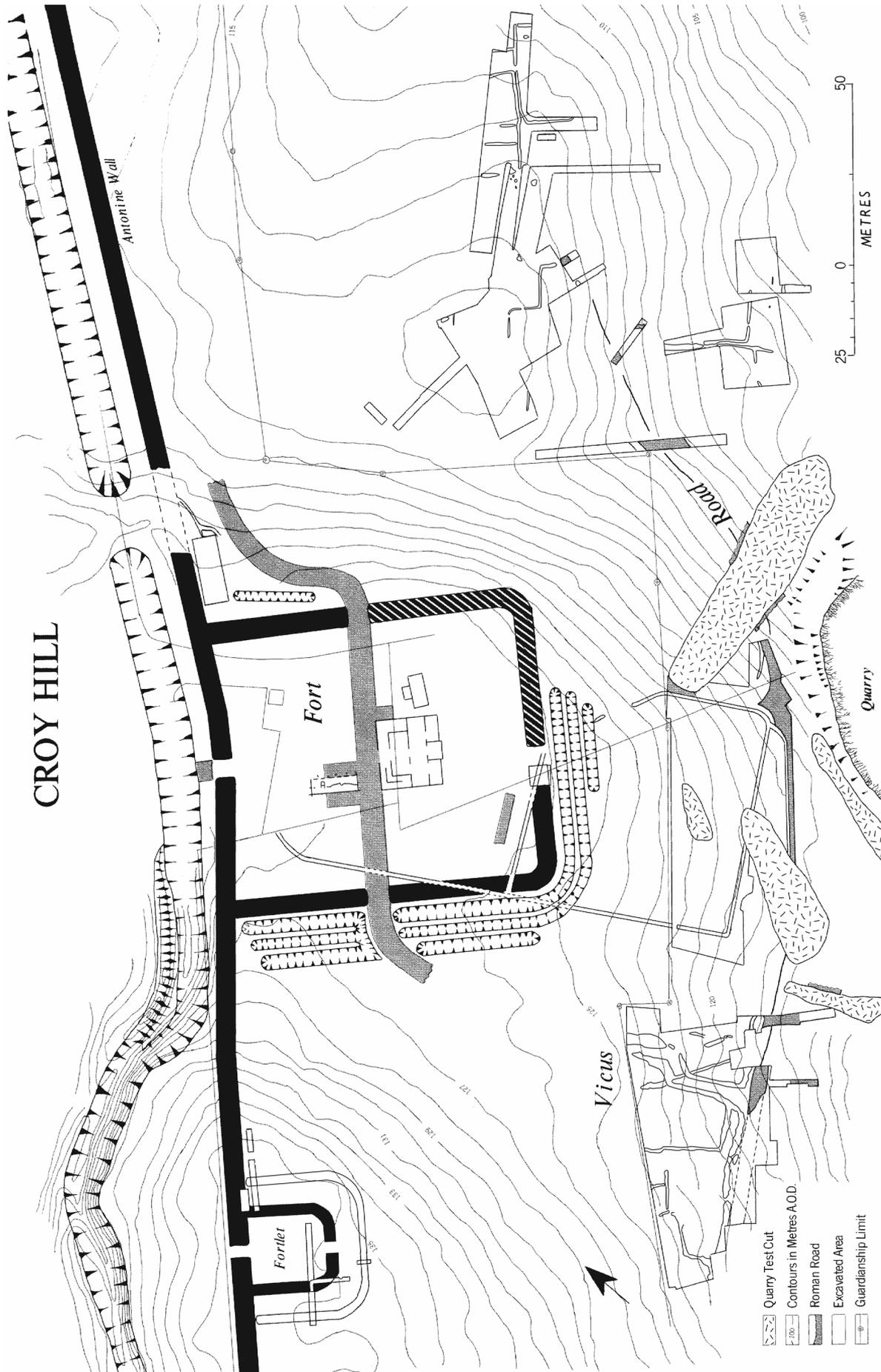
Wall (1720: 6 and frontispiece), and Gordon, who records finding a small Roman building inscription in the wall of a cottage on the site (1726: 56). However, he goes on to comment that the remains were already too denuded to plan, while Roy notes that they were totally levelled by the time of his detailed survey 32 years later (1793: 160).

These antiquarian references to a fort on Croy Hill were supported by records of a number of Roman stones recovered from the immediate vicinity. The most well-known is a sculptured relief illustrating three legionaries, almost certainly a tombstone, which had its inscription removed when it was taken from farm buildings on Croy Hill and built into the wall of nearby Nether Croy House at the beginning of the 19th century (*CSIR*: 90). Other inscribed stones from the area include three small building records of the sixth legion (*RIB* I: 2161–3), an altar dedicated to the nymphs by a detachment of the same legion (*RIB* I: 2160) and one dedicated to Mars (*RIB* I: 2159). The latter was found during quarrying in 1913 some 217m south of the Antonine Wall, along with a nearby plinth (Keppie 1998: 98), one of the few occasions for which the original location of discovery is recorded. In addition, many building stones tooled with broaching of typically Roman character were noted in the field walls and ruined parts of the farmstead by the Glasgow Archaeological Society's Antonine Wall Committee when cutting sections across the Wall and ditch on Croy Hill, and later by Sir George Macdonald (*GAS* 1899: 60–2; Macdonald 1925: 290; 1937: 32). By this time the farmstead was already abandoned, though a shepherd's cottage continued to occupy the site until it was demolished in 1935.

It was not until Macdonald's exploratory trenches in 1920 that the existence and location of the Roman fort was confirmed archaeologically (1925: 288–90). Between 1920 and 1935 he established sufficient of its outline to define its internal area, only 1.5 acres (0.6ha), and confirmed its secondary relationship with the Wall, demonstrating that the southern kerb of the Wall base continued unbroken past the butt ends of the fort wall (1925: 288–90; 1932: 243–68; 1937). These excavations also revealed the *via principalis* and two of the central range of stone buildings, the headquarters building and a granary. An unusual stone well or cistern



Illus 1.1 Site location



Illus 1.2 General plan of the excavated remains against their topographical background



Illus 1.3 Aerial photograph of the Antonine Wall (running from bottom left to top right) across Croy Hill from the south-west. The fort is situated between the trees (top right) and the fortlet on the higher point towards the centre. Nethercroy Quarry is just visible (middle right); Croy Quarry at the bottom. The bifurcation of the Military Way is readily apparent (bottom left)

was identified in the north-east corner of the fort. According to some, its primary relationship with the Wall appears to contradict the secondary character of the adjacent fort rampart (Graafstal et al 2015: 56–8), but Macdonald makes clear that the north-eastern side of the cistern had been demolished and filled with boulders to serve as the basis for the eastern rampart of the fort (1932: 251–61 and pl X). Finally, the site of an adjacent external bathhouse to the east was established, though only very slight details of its character were published.

Beneath and running at a slightly oblique angle to the fort, Macdonald discovered half of the outline of a small (*c* 0.3ha),² broadly rectangular enclosure, demarcated by a single ditch, and all four sides of a similarly sized but slightly irregular extension or annexe to that enclosure running beyond the fort to the south (1932: 262–6). The stratigraphic relationship with the fort and analogy with a similar example beneath the adjacent fort at Bar Hill (Macdonald & Park 1906: 11–15) led him to suggest that the enclosure represented one of

the 1st-century garrison posts (*praesidia*) across the Forth-Clyde isthmus which, according to Tacitus (*Agricola* 23), were built by Agricola during his fourth campaign.

1.3 Context and aims of the excavation

The stimulus for the rescue excavations reported upon here was the proposed development of Croy Quarry, located just over 0.5km to the south-west of the fort, to link up with and expand Nethercroy Quarry (Illus 1.1). The latter had been abandoned since the 1930s, by which time it had extended to within some 75m of the southern rampart of the fort. While both the site of the fort and the line of the Wall on either side of it, from Croy village to the fields surrounding Wester Dullatur Farm, are in the guardianship of the State, all of the area up to the fence line depicted on Illus 1.2, which encroached to within 50m of the rear of the line of the Antonine Wall on the east side of the fort, was subject to quarrying consent and potentially,



Illus 1.4 Aerial photograph of Croy Hill during the 1977 excavations from the north-west. The Antonine Wall runs at an angle from bottom right to mid-left. The fort lies on the flat plateau beneath the ruined farmstead in the centre, with the site of Nethercroy Quarry beyond it. The lower, damper ground to the east of the fort, beyond the unfinished section of ditch, is picked out by the change in vegetation cover. The site of the fortlet is indicated by the hand-dug excavation trench on higher ground towards the bottom right and the trenches over the southern part of the *vicus* are visible beyond it

therefore, under threat. Indeed, testing of the topsoil depth by the quarry company (Amalgamated Quarries, now Aggregate Industries) immediately to the south of the fort, mapped on Illus 1.2, had already destroyed some archaeological remains in the months immediately before the excavations began in August 1975. Over the years following the excavation, however, only the area immediately to the south and south-west of the fort came to be affected by the expansion of the quarry, whose operations were drawn to close in 2018.

Given the location of the threat anticipated in 1975, the focus of attention was on the extra-mural area to the south and east of the fort site, and the primary aims of the excavation were twofold:

1. To confirm the character and date of the pre-fort enclosure identified by Macdonald (above), whose annexe was known to extend into the area south of the fort.
2. To identify and reveal as much as possible about any associated civil settlement (*vicus*) which may have extended into the area under threat.

Accordingly, four seasons of excavation were undertaken between 1975 and 1978, totalling some 20 weeks in the field. This was funded by Historic Environment Scotland, then known as the Property Services Agency, Directorate of Scottish Services within the Department of the Environment.

1.4 Methodology and recording

A total of approximately 7,000m² was opened for investigation, with the topsoil stripped mechanically in order to maximise the area that might be examined. During the course of the primary excavation programme, additional specific research questions led to limited investigations within the guardianship area. In these cases the small trenches involved were dug entirely by hand and the features were excavated only sufficiently to answer the specific research questions posed.

Each excavation area was assigned one or more letter designators according to its size, each

designator signifying the responsibility of an individual site supervisor. Thus, Area L was located in the eastern half of the southern part of the *vicus* to the south-west of the fort and was investigated in 1977 (Illus 1.4) and 1978. Within each of these areas, excavated features were given a three-letter code beginning with the letter corresponding to the assigned area designation. Multiple layers within larger features were identified by the addition of a layer number. Thus, LAB 2 is the second layer recorded in the fill of an excavated segment of a large drainage ditch on the east side of the curvilinear trackway in Area L to the south-west of the fort.