

## 2. PRE-FORT ENCLOSURE

In the first season of excavation in 1975 an area of approximately 2,800m<sup>2</sup> was stripped by machine immediately outside the guardianship area to uncover the whole of the southern end of the annexe of the pre-fort enclosure (Areas B and C). This was revealed much as Macdonald had indicated (1932: 263); indeed, a number of his narrow trenches were identified, particularly on the east and west sides, indicating how he had chased the outline of the enclosure (Illus 2.1).

The subsoil in the area was boulder clay with occasional areas of protruding dolerite bedrock. This tended to make the recognition of smaller negative features quite difficult. Furthermore, archaeological preservation in the excavated area had been badly affected by centuries of ploughing, evidenced by occasional scouring of larger protruding stones, and was further undermined by three large scars that had been excavated by the quarry company only a few months earlier to check the depth of overburden (Illus 1.2). On the other hand, the process of soil creep on the sloping ground had served to cover and protect remains towards the southern limit of the excavated area, with some additional protection to underlying remains on the east side provided by a partially extant, collapsed dry-stone field dyke.

The excavation cut across the southern part of the rectangular enclosure at a slight angle, exposing its full width of 61m, but extending into the interior for only 15m on its west side, increasing to 28m on its east side. It was defined by a single ditch, without readily identifiable remains of an internal rampart (but see 2.1, below). The south-east corner was rounded in the manner typical of Roman military installations, though that in the south-west corner was rather sharper (Illus 2.1 and 2.2). One side of an entrance was identified on the western side where the ditch came to a butt end (BBP) some 2m from the northern limit of the trench. The other side of the entrance gap lay outside the area available for excavation, so its precise width could not be determined. No post holes or other structural features which might define some form of gate structure were recorded by the entrance gap.

Subsequently, in order to test the relationship between the enclosure and the fort established by Macdonald (1932: 264), permission was sought in

the third season (1977) to open a small trench some 6.00m by 6.00m (Area P) in the guardianship area at the point of intersection between the two.

### 2.1 Enclosure ditch

Eleven longitudinal segments of the enclosure ditch were excavated at fairly regular intervals around the perimeter (Illus 2.1). The dimensions of the ditch varied considerably because of the differential preservation already alluded to: the smallest at the south-west corner (BBT) (Illus 2.2) only 1.25m wide and 0.65m deep, though the ditch was even shallower (0.55m) towards the butt end by the western entrance (BBP); the largest, 2.3m wide and 1.05m deep, in the section on the east side protected by the field dyke (CCA) (Illus 2.3). The ditch profiles varied similarly, approximating for the most part to a shallow V-shape, but with a more flattened bottom in sections on the east side and around the south-east corner (eg CCA; CAB) (Illus 2.3 and 2.4).

None of the ditch sections showed any sign of recutting, with the possible exception of the northernmost section on the east side (CAB) (Illus 2.4) (see 4.1, below). All the ditch fills examined included a substantial build-up of washed-in silt, whose depth (0.2–0.4m) suggested that the ditch had been open to the elements for some time. There was certainly no indication that it had contained a palisade (*contra* Macdonald 1932: 262–3). The small boulders in the base of the ditch which Macdonald interpreted as post-pads were seen in the longer sections excavated to be no more than occasional tumbled stones. Although there was no direct evidence of an internal rampart, tip lines in some sections included turves (eg BBT; BBF; CCA) (Illus 2.3), which may reflect rampart material being redeposited in the ditch. Burnt layers or small spreads of charcoal were also recorded within the middle fills of some of the excavated ditch segments on the east side of the enclosure, notably CAB, CCA and CCN, though these did not always extend into the drawn sections. These layers may relate to the demolition or removal of internal features, such as hearths and the deliberate infilling of the ditch.

The small hand-dug excavation (Area P) opened in the guardianship area revealed the badly disturbed remains of the rubble base of the fort rampart (PAB/





**Illus 2.2** South-west corner of pre-fort enclosure after excavation

PAD) interspersed with orange-brown silty loam and natural bedrock across the whole trench. Running at an oblique angle across the northern half of the trench underlying this rampart base was the broad V-shaped cut of the pre-fort enclosure ditch (PAE), measuring 1.85m wide and 0.7m deep (Illus 2.5 and 2.6). It had silted up to a depth of *c* 0.4m prior to being sealed by the stones and silty loam of the rampart.

## 2.2 Interior

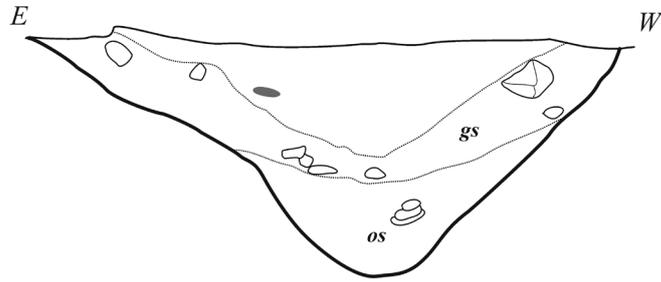
The interior of the enclosure was almost entirely devoid of archaeological features, presumably at least in part the result of intensive ploughing since the 18th century. Only three internal features were identified, clustered together in the south-west corner (Illus 2.1 and 2.2). A roughly circular feature (BBL) (Illus 2.7) some 1.95m in diameter and up to 0.5m deep, with heat-reddened sides and a fill of stones and orange-brown loam containing thick lenses of charcoal, was almost certainly a hearth. Within the

hearth two opposing stake-holes, 60mm in diameter and 1.5m apart, presumably provided bracing supports for cooking over a central fire. A small post hole (BBM), 0.7m in diameter and 0.23m deep, some 0.35m to the west was partly cut through an outcropping boulder and may have been associated. Some 3.5m away, less than 1m from the southern ditch of the enclosure, an oval spread of charcoal and dark soil mixed with a few large stones (BBK) may represent the bottom of another, larger hearth or oven (Illus 2.8). It measured approximately 2.8m by 1.05m and was not more than 0.10m in depth.

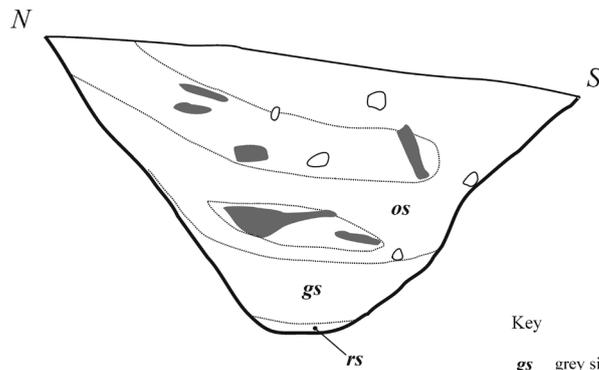
## 2.3 Associated finds

BBP/BBT, upper fills of pre-fort enclosure ditch on west side: 3 sherds of coarse ware; calcined bone  
 BBQ/CCQ, pre-fort enclosure ditch on south side: sherd of plain samian (conjoins sherd from recut trackway drainage ditch, LAB); 2 sherds of coarse ware; burnt daub

BBP



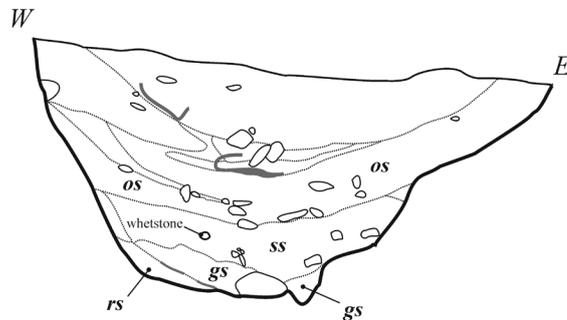
BBT



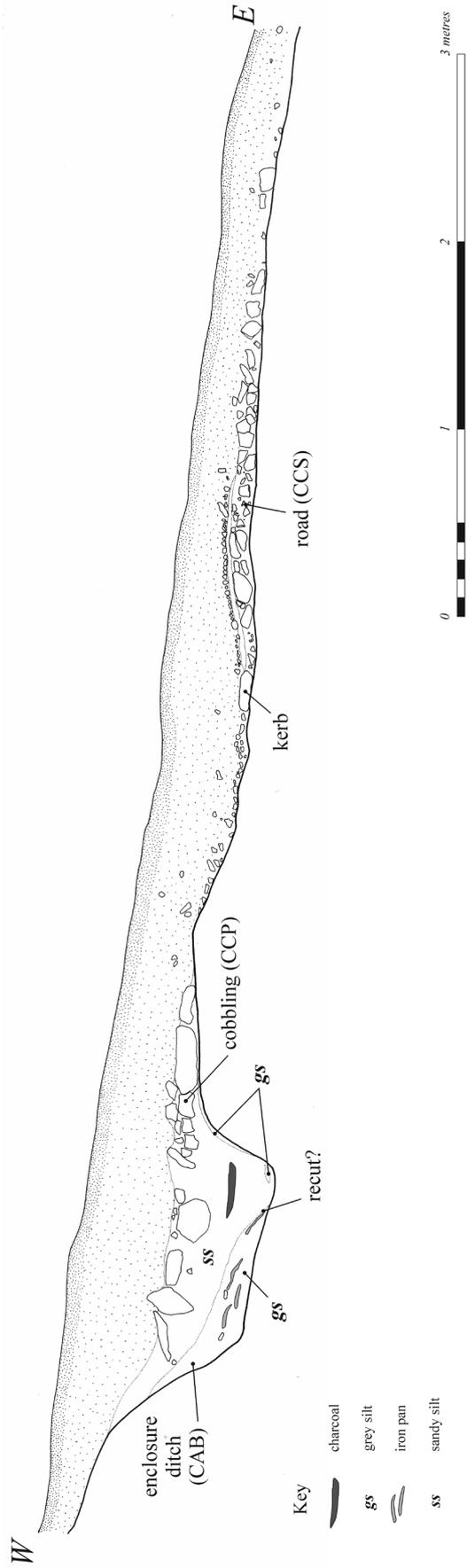
Key

- gs* grey silt
- os* orange/brown sandy silt
- rs* rapid silt
- ss* sandy silt
- turf

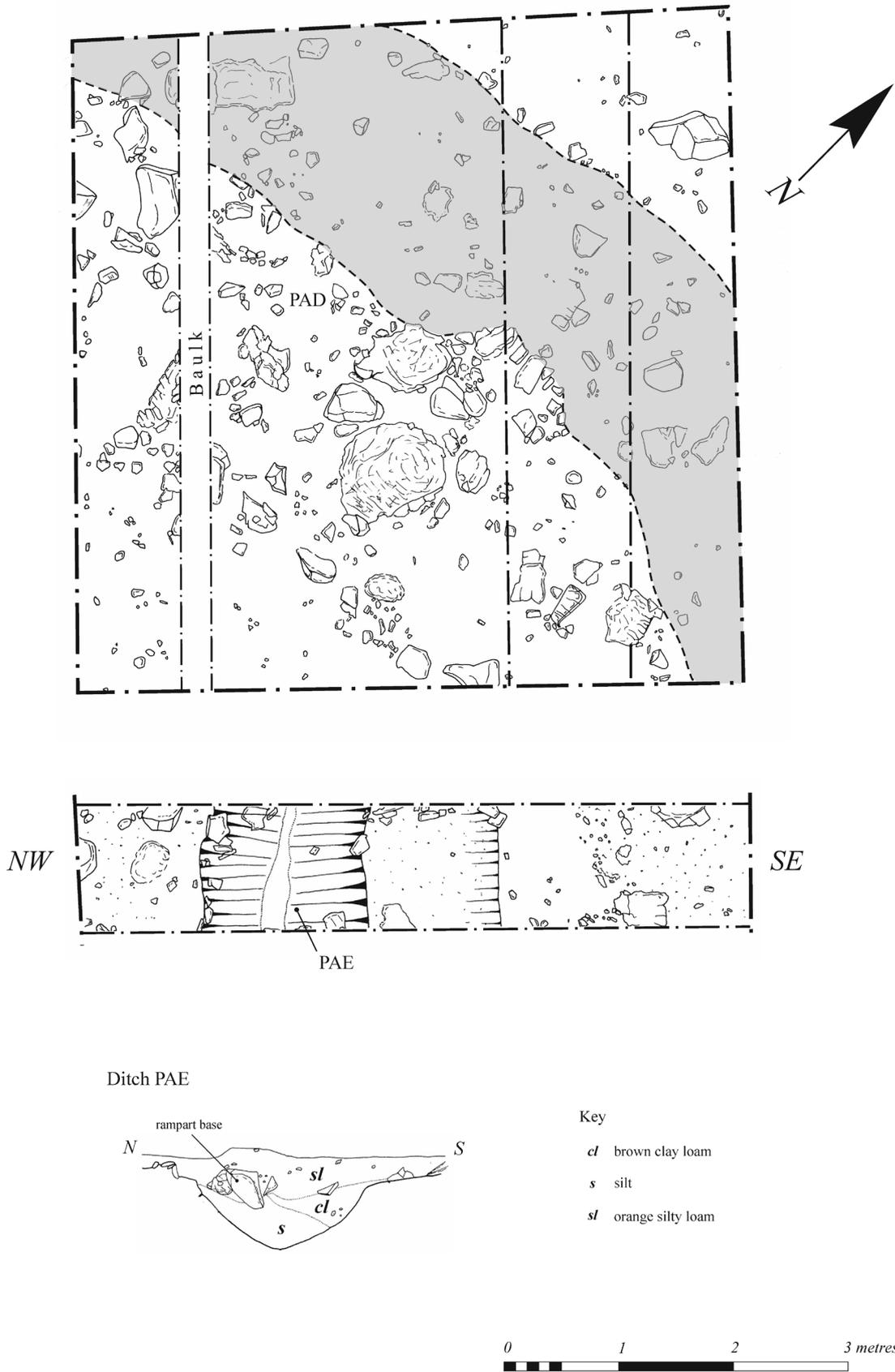
CCA



Illus 2.3 Enclosure ditch sections (BBP, BBT and CCA)



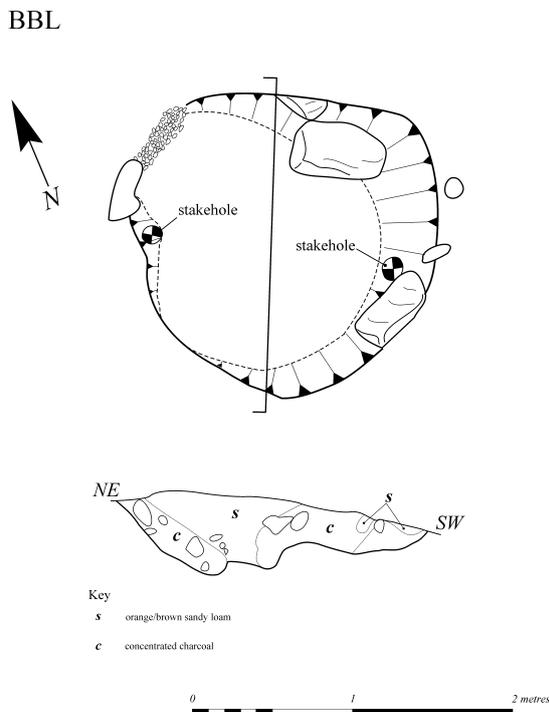
Illus 2.4 Section across ditch (CAB) on the west side of the enclosure, overlying cobbling (CCP) and adjacent road (CCS)



Illus 2.5 Plan and section of Trench P showing rampart base (PAD) and underlying ditch (PAE)



**Illus 2.6** Area P showing rampart base overlying enclosure ditch from north-east



**Illus 2.7** Plan and section of hearth (BBL) within pre-fort enclosure

CAB/CCA/CCH/CCN, pre-fort enclosure ditch on east side: fragment of enamelled bronze disc stud (Illus 9.5, B5; Illus 9.6); L-shaped iron rod; sandstone whetstone (Illus 9.4, S15); sherd of plain samian; 80 sherds of coarse ware; 2 nails; flake from a Neolithic polished stone axe (Illus 17.1 no. 6); fragments of bone; burnt daub

## 2.4 Interpretation and analogies

By chasing the line of the ditch with a series of very narrow trenches, Macdonald was able to determine two sides of the northern part of a bipartite enclosure, which lay beneath the fort, and all four sides of its southern extension or annexe, most of which lay outside the fort to the south. He identified only one entrance gap, located about a third of the way along the east side of the annexe. The excavations recorded here indicate two amendments to this general descriptive outline. Firstly, there was also an entrance gap on the western side of the annexe about a quarter of the way north of its south-west



**Illus 2.8** Section through possible hearth (BBK) from west

corner; and, secondly, the eastern side followed a rather straighter alignment (Illus 2.1).

Macdonald was correct in concluding that the bipartite enclosure did indeed pre-date the fort. However, his assumption that it related to the Agricolan halt on the Forth-Clyde isthmus is incorrect (*contra* Macdonald 1932: 262–6). The spatial relationship between the east ditch of the enclosure and the link road heading for the south gate of the fort (see 4.1, below) was sufficient to indicate that at some point they were in use contemporaneously (Hanson 1977: 6–7). This was confirmed by the recovery of only early Antonine pottery, including black burnished and colour-coated wares, in the fills of the enclosure ditch (Gillam 1975: 54). An early Antonine date for the broadly similar enclosure beneath the fort at Bar Hill is also now generally accepted. Though no artefactual dating evidence was recovered from the ditches of the latter, other than a leather shoe, those on its south side had clearly been deliberately backfilled immediately prior to the construction of the Antonine fort (Macdonald & Park 1906: 11–15 and 38), while Antonine pottery was recovered from an associated hearth within the enclosure (Keppie 1985: 54–8).

The limited features in the interior of the annexe would be entirely in keeping with the function of the enclosure at Croy Hill as a temporary camp. The larger of the two hearths in particular is reminiscent of the base of one of the field ovens

that have been identified at a number of temporary camps in recent years (eg Cook & Dunbar 2008: 133–49). However, Macdonald records a stretch of roadway that runs parallel to the ditch on the south side of the main, northern part of the enclosure, which suggests a longer period of occupation than is normally presumed for such temporary works. Hearths and shallow drainage gullies were the main features recorded within the enclosure at Bar Hill, though possible shallow construction trenches and cobble footings for timber structures were also noted (Keppie 1985: 54–8), again suggesting something more than temporary occupation. Nonetheless, given the date, location and small size of the Croy Hill enclosure (0.64ha in total), some association with the construction of the Antonine Wall is difficult to gainsay. It was previously suggested that it might relate to the construction of the primary fortlet to the west of the fort (Hanson & Maxwell 1986: 120). An alternative hypothesis, in light of its position adjacent to one of the highest points on the Wall line, is that it could have housed troops involved in the surveying and laying out of that line (Jones 2005: 553–4; 2011: 330).

How long the enclosure was in use is difficult to estimate on the basis of ditch silting, but perhaps months rather than years. The filling of the ditches thereafter, with traces of burning and turves, is suggestive of deliberate demolition. A similar fate was certainly met by the enclosure on Bar Hill, where the packing of the ditch with

turf and branches or rubble was clearly attested prior to the construction of the superimposed fort (Keppie 1985: 54–5; Macdonald & Park 1906: 38). However, the presence of a sherd of samian from the ditch on the south side of the Croy Hill enclosure that joins with one from the fill of the recutting of the ditch on the east side of the trackway leading down from the *vicus* may

indicate that the enclosure ditches remained at least partially open throughout much of the occupation of the site. Indeed, the ditches on the east side of the enclosure seem to have served a secondary function draining the west side of the link road up to the south gate of the fort for some time, before they too were deliberately infilled and partially cobbled over (see 4.1, below).