

21. CONCLUSIONS

21.1 Prehistoric occupation

The attractiveness of this hillside for settlement was indicated not only by the 18th–19th-century farmstead that overlies the site of the fort, but by the discovery of approximately one third of an early Iron Age palisaded enclosure with an entrance facing east (Illus 6.2 and 7.1). A limited scatter of artefacts from the Neolithic and Bronze Age (Illus 16.1, 16.2, 17.1 and 17.2) provided further confirmation of long-standing prehistoric activity in the immediate vicinity.

21.2 The sequence of military occupation

The sequence of Roman military occupation on the site now seems clear and is of considerable importance for our understanding of the planning and construction of the Antonine Wall. The existence of a fortlet to the west of the known fort was confirmed, its rampart structurally contemporary with the Wall (Illus 3.4). Within the constraints of the very limited examination of its interior, a central road was identified with probable traces of a subdivided, rectangular timber building on its east side (Illus 3.7). The provision of an extensive area of timber duckboarding immediately outside the north-east corner of the fortlet in the lee of the Antonine Wall was probably intended to provide a base for a brazier that would have been largely sheltered from the elements. The apparent outward collapse of the turf rampart and the presence of turf within the east ditch suggests that the fortlet had been deliberately demolished. Hints of secondary cobbling in the interior may be associated with that abandonment.

Contrary to the view of Macdonald, who originally identified it (1932: 262–6), the enclosure beneath the fort on the plateau to the east of the fortlet was not an earlier Flavian fort, but an Antonine camp that seems to have been occupied for some time. This may have served either as the construction camp for the fortlet or to house the surveyors laying out the line of the Wall (Jones 2011: 330). The latter is, perhaps, slightly more likely given its location adjacent to one of the highest points along the length of the Wall.

Croy Hill is currently one of three sites that provide unequivocal support for the hypothesis, first proposed by John Gillam (1975), that the original plan of the Antonine Wall was broadly based on the developed plan of Hadrian's Wall. Gillam suggested that the Antonine Wall was originally intended to have forts positioned approximately every 8 miles (12.8km), with fortlets at intervals averaging approximately 1 mile (1.6km) in between, but that it then went through major changes during the course of its construction that resulted in the addition of a series of generally smaller forts, some of which replaced fortlets. This fits neatly with the evidence from Croy Hill, where both the base and the superstructure of the fortlet rampart were clearly built as one with the Antonine Wall, indicating they were part of the original plan. By contrast, the small (1.5 acres: 0.6ha) fort was built as a later addition. Its location, only 80m east of the fortlet, makes little sense as part of the original planned layout for the frontier, as the presence of the fort would have made the fortlet superfluous. Moreover, there is unequivocal structural evidence of the secondary character of the fort (Macdonald 1932: 247 and pl X). Not only is its rampart on the west side not bonded with the base of the Wall, abutting it at a higher level and actually overlapping the Wall base, but the fort overlies the site of a construction camp that seems likely to have been occupied for some months and has now been shown to be of Antonine date. That said, the otherwise clear structural relationship between the Antonine Wall and the fort at Croy Hill is muddled slightly by the presence of a stone-lined cistern in its north-east corner, from which an outlet runs under the Wall base (Macdonald 1932: 251–61), indicating that its construction preceded or was contemporary with the building of the Wall. Macdonald records that the cistern was provided with steps down almost to its base and rapidly filled with water during its excavation. However, he goes on to note quite specifically that the north-eastern side of this cistern had been demolished and filled with boulders to serve as the basis for the eastern rampart of the fort, thus further confirming the fort's secondary character. The cistern may well have been intended to supply water for the fortlet or even for the construction camp, capitalising on a natural spring at this point.

By way of a challenge to the overall structural sequence proposed here, it has been suggested recently that the known fort was not in its originally intended position (Graafstal 2020: 167–71). Some 60m to the east of its north gate there is a well-known original break in the ditch where over a distance of *c* 25m the underlying quartz-dolerite rock comes to the surface. Graafstal has suggested that the primary cistern, perhaps linked to the nearby bathhouse, is all that remains of an earlier fort centred on this causeway. There is, however, nothing to commend this hypothesis. Firstly, there is absolutely no archaeological evidence of an earlier defence system in the relevant location to define such a fort, either in Macdonald's excavations or in those reported on here. Secondly, the hypothetical site of this earlier fort is in a highly unsuitable topographic location, incorporating an area of steeply sloping and lower-lying, potentially damp ground. This is clearly apparent in the contour survey (Illus 1.2), in several aerial photographs (eg Illus 1.4. See also HES DP249551) and, indeed, to anyone visiting the site today. The dampness of the area is further confirmed by the identification of a probable midden at the northern limit of excavations to the east of the known fort (5.3, above). Given the suitability for settlement of the flat, sheltered plateau only a few metres to the west, where both the known fort and the early modern farmstead were located, it makes absolutely no sense to suggest that it was originally intended to place the fort in such an inferior topographic position.

The break in the ditch would appear to have a much more prosaic explanation. As Macdonald appreciated, the removal by hand of an impenetrable quartz-dolerite surface outcrop at this point is likely to have been sufficiently daunting to have deterred the legionary builders tasked with digging the ditch (1934: 262–3). Indeed, he also noted that the southward continuation of the same outcrop just below the contemporary ground surface had prevented the digging of ditches outside the south-east corner of the fort (1932: 250–51). Nor is this the only location along the line of the Wall where problems with the underlying subsoil seem to have defeated the Roman builders. A similar example is evident on the northern shoulder of Castle Hill to the east of the fort at Bar Hill (Macdonald 1934: 148), with possibly another near the western end

of the Wall at Carleith (Keppie & Breeze 1981: 242–3).

The evidence from two other sites on the Antonine Wall clearly also supports the Gillam hypothesis, and provides structural sequences comparable to Croy Hill. At Duntocher a fortlet was replaced by a small fort with an annexe (Robertson 1957), though in this case both were constructed before the Antonine Wall arrived on site, indicating that the change of plan thus represented occurred before the construction of the Wall rampart had been completed. There is a possibility that what Robertson identified as the fort was in fact the annexe and vice versa (Swan 1999: 432–3), but this does not affect the interpretation of the sequence of building. In attempting to explain away the evidence from Duntocher, Symonds suggests that the small 'fort' was actually an annexe attached to the fortlet (2018: 140), but this suggestion lacks parallels on either linear barrier in Britain. Nor does it explain the character of the larger enclosure attached to it, which incorporates the fortlet, or the sequence of construction involved.

The second site with a comparable structural sequence is Castlehill, where antiquarian accounts refer to a small, rectangular raised plateau on the summit of the hill, situated within a larger enclosure (Keppie 1980: 80–2). The latter was confirmed as a fort by aerial photography in 1947 (St Joseph 1951: 61) and more recently resistivity survey has identified a rectangular, single-ditched enclosure at the back of the Wall at the top of the hill in the north-west corner of the fort (Hanson & Jones 2020: 223–4). Its shape and dimensions are quite closely paralleled by those of the ditch surrounding the fortlet at Kinneil (Bailey & Cannell 1996: 308, illus 3 and 28). Magnetometer and LiDAR survey reveals a clear disjuncture at the point of intersection between the Wall ditch and the ditches of the fort in that corner, indicating that they were not of contemporary construction and suggesting a sequence similar to that at Duntocher (Hanson & Jones 2020: 225–31).

In light of the evidence that a fortlet was superseded by a fort at Croy Hill and at two other sites along the Wall, it remains difficult to accept the recent assertion that the Antonine Wall was entirely unitary in both concept and planning (*contra* Graafstal et al 2015; Graafstal 2020). Thus,

the Gillam hypothesis still best explains the totality of the structural evidence, even if the sequence of primary forts and fortlets proves to be less regular than he envisaged. The occurrence of relatively minor structural ambiguities noted at a very small number of sites (Hanson & Maxwell 1986: 107–8; Graafstal et al 2015: 56–7) can still most reasonably be explained by the differential phasing of the various elements of the building programme (Hanson 2020a).

When during the construction of the Wall the decision was made to place more forts on its line, there proved to be insufficient room on the small plateau to build over the fortlet at Croy Hill, as was done at Duntocher and Castlehill, so the fort was moved to the nearest suitable spot on the adjacent larger plateau some 80m to the east, the site of the earlier construction camp. Exactly when this took place is difficult to estimate. The identification of an internal roadway by Macdonald suggests that the camp was intended to be occupied for some time (1932: 265 and pl X). Indeed, it remained in use long enough for up to 0.4m of silt to accumulate in its ditches before they were deliberately backfilled to facilitate the construction of the rampart of the fort, so the timescale of occupation of the camp should probably be measured in months rather than weeks. On the east side of the camp's annexe, however, the ditch continued to be utilised, at least for a time, to drain the road linking the south gate of the fort to the southern bypass road. This sequence of construction fits well with the evidence from the west end of the Wall that the decision to place additional forts on the line came some time before building work on the linear barrier was complete (Hanson & Maxwell 1986: 106–9).

The character of the garrison of the fort is not known, though the possibility of a small legionary presence has been postulated (Keppie 2009: 1137; Breeze 2020: 291–2), primarily on the basis of the epigraphic and sculptural evidence from the site (1.2, above). Two artefacts recovered from the excavations on the fringe of the *vicus* lend some further, if slight, support for this conjecture. Among the wealth of finds from the drainage ditches that flanked the trackway leading down the slope to the bypass road was a tie-ring from a *lorica segmentata*. Though there have been suggestions that this distinctive form of body armour was also used by auxiliaries,

the evidence makes clear that the *lorica segmentata* was primarily worn by legionaries (9.1.2, no. B2, above; Bishop 2002: 91). Secondly, an arm-purse was recovered from the same ditches (9.1.2, no. B21, above). These bronze purses are rare finds, this being the only example known from the Antonine Wall, and also tend to be associated with legionary troops (Birley 1963: 7–8).

21.3 The military *vicus*

One of the original primary aims of the excavation was to try to reveal any trace of contemporary civil settlement around the fort. Only part of one probable open-ended, rectangular timber building of somewhat idiosyncratic construction was identified during the excavation, lying within a fenced enclosure to the north of the bypass road. Nonetheless, the main focus of the *vicus* can confidently be located immediately to the north of this structure within the guardianship area on the well-sheltered, flat plateau just to the west of the fort and south of the fortlet. This assertion is based on the recovery of substantial quantities of pottery and a broad range of other finds from the complex of gullies and recut drainage ditches which wound their way down the hillside to the south-west of the fort. Both the range and volume of the material from these ditches far exceeded that from any other area of the excavation. This material also hinted at the quality of the *vicus* buildings, some with plastered walls, window glass and highly romanised forms of decoration, as well as indicating the intensity and range of activities that were taking place within them. Unfortunately, later attempts to confirm the location of the *vicus* by geophysical survey within the guardianship area were unsuccessful (Hanson et al forthcoming). This failure should not be taken to indicate that the hypothesis is incorrect, but rather it demonstrates the limitations of this survey methodology under some conditions. Because of the naturally magnetic character of the subsoil, only resistivity survey could be undertaken and this failed even to identify the northward continuation of the large drainage ditches that had been recorded in the excavations to the south-west of the fort.

The two main drainage ditches excavated here followed a sinuous course down the slope, probably flanking a trackway from the *vicus* to the road which

bypassed the fort. The trackway aligns well with the curvature of the *via principalis* as it exits the fort to the west (Illus 1.2). The existence of a bypass road leaving the line of the Military Way some 300m west of the fort had originally been established by Glasgow Archaeological Society's Antonine Wall Committee (1899: 67) and its line confirmed by Macdonald (1934: 144–5). This excavation traced it intermittently over a distance of some 275m, looping round to the south of the fort before heading back up the slope towards the Military Way on its east side. The bypass road was both important and well used. This was indicated by wheel ruts, resurfacing and realignment, as well as a relocation to follow a slightly more northerly route around the south of the fort when the earlier line was partially washed away.

Finally, examination of a substantial area extending for over 150m to the east of the fort found a combination of fence lines and ditches on both sides of the bypass road. They followed

a consistent north/south or east/west alignment, dividing up the area into small parcels presumably for industrial purposes or to house livestock. Within one of the rectilinear enclosures so formed was a probable pottery kiln that had gone out of use in the Roman period. Local manufacture of pottery was further indicated by examination of the mortaria, the coarse ware and their fabrics. Broken or incomplete stone architectural fragments from the backfill of the kiln and from an adjacent large pit hinted at the presence nearby of a mason's yard. Further fragments of incomplete worked sandstone were found in the drainage ditches south of the *vicus*. Finally, at the southern limit of the excavation, still within this system of land division, was a single cremation in a grey-ware jar, hinting at the presence of a cemetery, though a second large trench opened to the east of it failed to identify any further burials. Thus, occupation contemporary with the fort can be shown to have extended over a wide area all around it.