

The Peel of Kirkintilloch

Archaeological Enigma

Mistaken Identity

For many years the antiquarians of olden times believed that the stone building at the Peel, surrounded by a square system of deep ditches with rounded corners, was the remains of the Roman fort. The legend on the First Edition Ordnance Survey Map of the 1850s, 'Remains of Roman Wall Station', seemed to provide the ultimate authority to support this interpretation. As late as 1899 Peter McGregor Chalmers believed that he was excavating a Roman site, albeit with significant mediaeval overlay.

No Romans in Kirkintilloch?

Following the excavation of 1899 the Peel was visited by many antiquarians and archaeologists from both Scotland and England. Some of the English visitors, in particular, were at pains to point out that, contrary to previous interpretation, the Peel remains displayed no Roman characteristics. Professor F.J.Haverfield went even further, and declared that there was no sound evidence for a Roman presence of any kind at the Peel.

Roman Presence Reaffirmed

The English doubts stimulated George Macdonald, the famous Scottish archaeologist, to carry out a re-examination of all the facts. He agreed that the visible remains were not Roman, but felt that some of the other statements went too far. His review was supplemented in 1914 by an excavation that seemed to leave no room for doubt about Roman presence at the Peel. During the 1950s and early 1960s archaeological excavation by Professor Anne S. Robertson and others provided further evidence. Professor Robertson also established the presence of the Antonine Wall near the brow of the hill. Earlier interpretation had suggested that it lay much further to the south.



Plan of the Peel, showing the results of excavations over the period 1853-81.



Archaeological excavations at Union Street, close by the Peel, in 1979. The Roman ditch, discovered here (running parallel to the street) is believed to be the south-east of Kirkintilloch Roman Fort.



Part of the stone base of the Antonine Wall in Peel Park, photographed when newly excavated in 1963. A transverse drainage channel can be seen. Photo courtesy of the late Professor Anne S. Robertson.



Archaeological excavations at the Peel, April 1955. Photo courtesy of the late Professor Anne S. Robertson.