
8 Discussion

The most significant result of the Kirk Hall excavation is the identification of a possible third defensive ditch outside the fort at Cramond. The ditch was turned to flank the road running towards the fort, and was presumably looped together with the two inner ditches described by Holmes. No evidence for a third ditch has been encountered in previous excavations at Cramond, but neither have they provided any grounds for ruling out its existence. The excavations at 23 Cramond Glebe Road (DES 1995), outside the south gate of the fort, found no evidence for either the second or third ditches in their projected locations, but the area excavated was perhaps too small for this to count as evidence of their absence. In any case, it is possible that the ditches were not present on all sides of the fort. The evidence for the road on the Kirk Hall site, consisting of an undated cobbled surface and possible roadside ditches, is somewhat circumstantial but gains support from what is known of its route from previous excavations. These features are thought to be part of the original Antonine construction, as the few finds recovered from them included no Severan material.

The presence of earlier Roman ditches, apparently unrelated to the fort and cut by the Antonine ditches, raises some interesting possibilities. A ditch on a similar alignment was excavated at 23 Cramond Glebe Road, where it was suggested that it might belong to an earlier fort, so the possibility of a Flavian fort at Cramond cannot be discounted; alternatively, the Antonine fort may have been preceded by one or more temporary camps in the vicinity. The small size of the features at the Kirk Hall site is, however, difficult to reconcile with either interpretation.

The history of the fort at Cramond as proposed by Rae & Rae envisages two phases of Antonine construction, followed by a period of abandonment and reoccupation during the Severan invasion (Rae & Rae 1974). This interpretation has been questioned by Holmes, who points to the lack of evidence for an intervening phase of demolition which might be expected if the Roman army had withdrawn from Cramond as part of the general retreat from the Antonine frontier around AD 160 (Holmes 2003, 147–51). Holmes suggests that Cramond might have been retained as an outpost during the later second century, which would explain the apparent fact that the Antonine buildings in the interior of the fort survived – at least in part – to be repaired and reused during the Severan occupation, when Cramond would have functioned as a support base for military operations further to the north. The presence of pottery types which suggest, without proving, continued occupation in the later second

century is also cited by Holmes in support of this view. The evidence for Severan occupation of the fort itself is problematic, however, as so few finds of definite Severan date were recovered from the Raes' excavations in the interior of the fort; the case for the Severan phase rests mainly on two coins of Julia Domna sealed by the floors of buildings within the *praetentura*. With this exception, it can be argued that the fort itself was not reoccupied in any substantial way during the Severan invasion, despite the activity within the annexe to the east.

A change in the use of the site at Cramond between the Antonine and Severan occupations is suggested by the fact that the outer defensive ditch and roadside ditches excavated at the Kirk Hall site went out of use and were allowed to silt up, and were then slighted by the drain, well and pits which cut across them. These later features, back-filled in the early third century, appear to represent the encroachment of settlement and/or industrial activity on the outer defences of the fort, which had ceased to be maintained. This is consistent with the lack of evidence for Severan re-cutting in the two inner defensive ditches (Holmes 2003, 7–8). The construction of what seems to have been an open drain, cutting across the line of the road, also suggests that the gateway of the fort was no longer in use. Even if the fort was occupied at this date, strong defences were evidently no longer deemed necessary in this location. This might reflect a changed role for Cramond as a supply base, situated within the large defended annexe to the east of the fort. The metalwork associated with the early third-century backfilling of the later features confirms the military associations of this phase. Charred cereal grains and legumes also indicate that food was being processed on the site; an assemblage of horse beans associated with vetch/tare seeds in the fill of the well appears to derive from drying or roasting of a bean crop.

A reappraisal of the pottery from earlier investigations at Cramond indicates continued activity, with Roman connections at Cramond in the later third century. A late third- or early fourth-century date can be definitely assigned to several sherds published previously (Holmes 2003), while many others previously described as Severan are more likely to be later. Most of the forts in Scotland are thought to have been abandoned rapidly after the death of Severus and the subsequent withdrawal of the army, but the later history of Cramond may differ in this respect. Whether the later material represents a continuing, if intermittent, military presence, or some other form of occupation, perhaps by a local potentate with Roman connections, remains an open question.