

III.

THE ROMAN CAMP AT CHANNELKIRK, BERWICKSHIRE.

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In *The Military Antiquities of North Britain*, published in 1793, General Roy described and figured a Roman camp at Channelkirk in Berwickshire (fig. 1), which had been discovered by Captain Melville in the middle of the eighteenth century.

Even in Roy's time the defences were largely obliterated. His plan shows two sides of the camp. The north side runs from the head of a small ravine for some 440 yards, by his scale, to a rounded and somewhat acute angle at the north-west point. The west side is some 570 yards in length, with a gateway near the middle, covered by a traverse or *titulus*. The south end of this side is at the head of a small ravine, on the opposite side of which the line is continued to the south-west for some 210 yards to a curiously formed construction, which Roy describes as "a small fort or redoubt, that seems either to have joined to the camp itself, or to have been connected with it by means of a line."² The rest of the *vallum* was obliterated, but Roy suggests that the camp may have been similar in size to that at Cleghorn, which measures 600 by 420 yards. It would thus hold one legion with auxiliaries, or two legions on the Polybian establishment.

Chalmers in his *Caledonia* (1807) draws his information from Roy, and also refers to a survey in 1803 by Kinghorn. He states that "the

¹ *West Kintyre Field-names*, Rev. D. J. Macdonald (1908); *Trans. Gaelic Soc. of Inverness*, vol. xxvii.

² *Milit. Antiq.*, p. 61.

church, churchyard, and the minister's glebe of Channelkirk, containing nearly five acres, are comprehended in the area of this singular camp." This is probably the authority upon which the Ordnance Survey map shows a "Roman Camp" close to the west of the church.¹

Dr Christison, in a map showing rectilinear works in his *Early*



Fig. 1. General Roy's Plan of the Roman Camp at Channelkirk.

Fortifications in Scotland (1898), indicates a "supposed Roman Camp" at Channelkirk, but does not deal with the site in the text of his book.

Dr Curle states that the remains are not now recognisable as Roman; ² and the *Inventory of Ancient Monuments in the County of Berwick* (1915),

¹ The Rev. Archibald Allan, under whose guidance I first examined the ground, suggests in his *History of Channelkirk* (1900, p. 646) that the character of the wall-mound forming the lower boundaries of the manse garden and glebe may have formed an angle of the camp. As it is 1200 yards distant from the north-east angle, however, this can hardly be so. If Roman, it might belong to a small fort, placed in a defensive position near the camp, as at Chew Green, but no early writer has suggested the presence of such.

² *A Roman Frontier Post* (1911), p. 9.

classifies the relic as a "defensive enclosure," and describes briefly "the indefinite remains of a rampart of the so-called Roman camp."

The site of the camp is on an elevated tableland 1100 feet above sea level, and half a mile west-north-west of Channelkirk church (fig. 2). Most of the north *vallum* shown on Roy's plan is still traceable, and is the

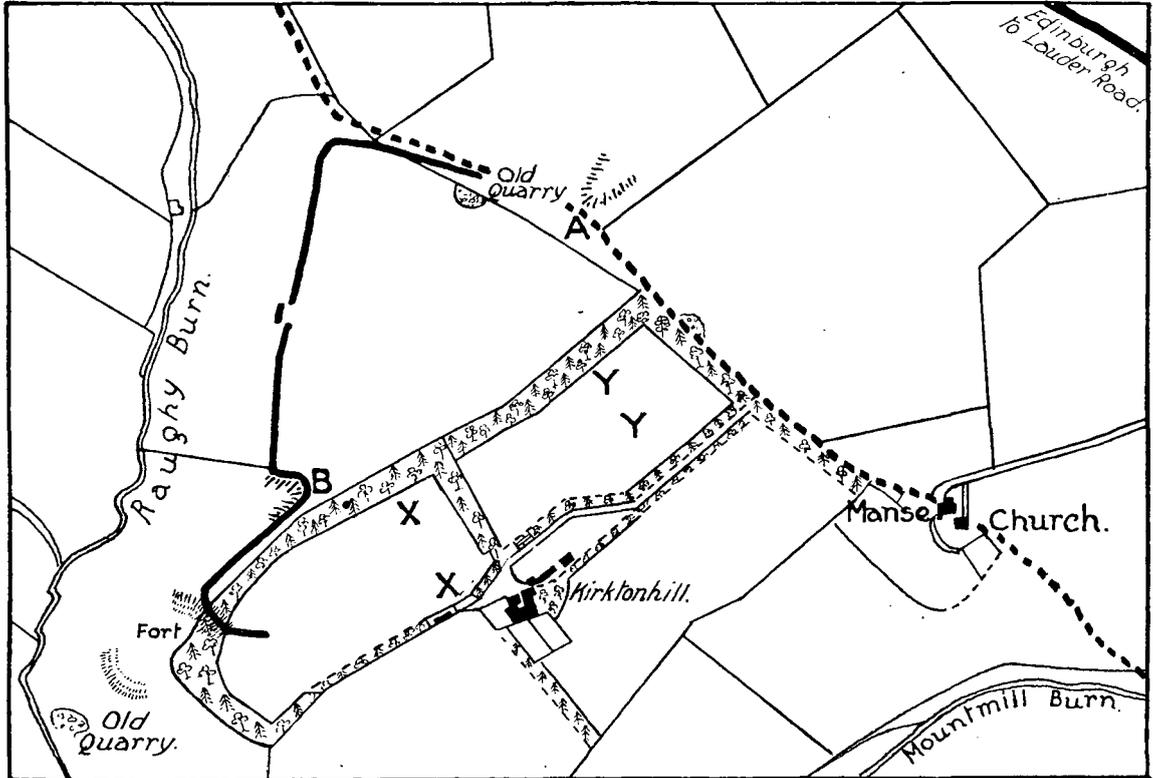


Fig. 2. Roman Camp at Channelkirk, Berwickshire (880 feet to an inch).

best-preserved part of the camp to-day, but it cannot be traced as far as the head of the small ravine to the east, from which it falls short by some 160 yards. It is first found close to the north of a small quarry, and runs west for 230 yards to the north-west angle of the camp. This angle is much destroyed by the old Edinburgh road having cut through it.¹ The west side of the camp then follows for 530 yards the line of a field wall, which is built on the *vallum*. The ditch is quite obliterated, but signs of

¹ This old road runs north over a *col*, which must also have carried the Roman road. The probable course of the latter is shown by a dotted line on the above plan.

the *vallum* are evident for most of its course as far as the head of the small ravine shown by Roy at its southern end. Between this ravine and Roy's "redoubt" no trace remains.

The first digging which I carried out at the camp was on 30th September 1921, when, having obtained the permission of Mr Dykes, the tenant of Kirktonhill, I spent a day on the site with Mr Ian Blackadder, Ninewells Mains. A somewhat level space near the middle of the mound, which forms the foundation of the wall at the west side of the camp, had been regarded as the gateway shown by Roy; all trace of a traverse outside, however, had disappeared. Digging here, we soon found the U-shaped trench of the traverse, which was 69 feet in length. The bottom was 3 feet 2 inches beneath the surface of the ground, and 64 feet from the crest of the *vallum* of the camp.

From the 20th to the 23rd of March 1922 I took a workman to the camp and cut several sections through the trench. At A, on the east side of the head of the small ravine which lies to the east of the camp, I found a shallow trench 12 feet wide and 2 feet 4 inches deep, which I took at the time to be the trench of the camp; it is possible, however, that it may have been the ditch at the side of the Roman road which doubtless passed between the ravine and the camp. To the west of the ravine, and between it and the small quarry where traces of the *vallum* begin, cross trenches entirely failed to reveal any remains of a ditch. The ground here was of such a stony nature that any previous excavation had failed to leave evidence behind. Attention was then turned to the line shown by Roy between the "redoubt" and the head of the ravine at the south-west corner of the camp. Here several cross trenches were dug, in each of which the ditch was found running in a straight line as shown by Roy. It runs to the north of and roughly parallel to the wall of a strip of plantation, from which it is distant 84 feet, where it reaches the "redoubt."

This "redoubt" is certainly a native fort, indistinguishable in character, save for one feature, from the numerous native forts to be found in this district. Some ten or twelve years before, when making a plan which has been reproduced in the *Inventory* (No. 27, fig. 9), I had found difficulty in explaining a straight mound which ran like a chord, cutting off a small segment of the fort; to the east of it was the high rampart and deep trench of the fort, and to the west of it two low mounds running concentrically with the main rampart. Subdividing mounds are not infrequent in Border forts, but nowhere else had I seen a narrow segment cut off with a straight mound like this. The explanation of the mound now became apparent, for excavation showed it to connect with the line of trench coming from the head of the ravine. A

section cut within the fort showed a shallow trench running along the west side of the straight mound, the trench of the main rampart of the fort being of course at the east or outer side. Following this trench, we found it to turn again on leaving the fort, and to run east-south-east in a straight line, passing close to the south of a small outcrop of rock, at a distance of 60 yards from the wood. All efforts to trace it farther were without success.

The explanation of the features of this fort I take to be as follows: The two low mounds to the west or lower side of the chord belonged to a pre-Roman fort. The Romans drew the lines of their camp, or of an annex connected with their camp, so as to run close to the fort and dominate it. Later, when the Romans no longer held the camp, the native race re fortified their fort, cutting an additional trench through the Roman work, and throwing their rampart on the top of the Roman *vallum*. At the north end, where this has taken place, there is a slight protuberance or shoulder on the east face of the native rampart, this I take to be the earlier Roman *vallum*, which has become apparent through the looser soil of the superimposed rampart becoming consolidated and leaving the firmer *vallum* to project.

If this interpretation be correct, the massive character of the later work, with its rampart still standing 7 feet above the trench, would suggest that the native race had not failed to take a lesson from the methods of their conquerors.

On 5th June 1925 I followed the trench round the head of the south-west ravine. It was noticeable that while the trench to the north of the ravine showed a depth of 4 feet, to the south it was less than half that depth, and much narrower. This might suggest that the trench of the camp turned east at this point, and that what lies to the south-west belongs to an annex or enclosure. Such an interpretation would conform much better with what we would expect the form and size of the camp to be. I examined this part, however, with trenches, and failed to find any trace of the trench turning east. In the field to the south of the strip of plantation I also cut a trench, X——X on fig. 2, at the east side, from the top of the field to the bottom, without result. In this field there is a hard, red subsoil immediately beneath the top spit, and it was quite clear that no trench had ever crossed the ground. The only relic picked up during the work was found in this field, some fifty yards from the wood, and half-way along the slope—a round, flattened pebble, ground flat on one side for use as a counter or playing-man. The only other trench to be cut was in the field to the north-east of the last-mentioned. Here a trench (Y——Y) was cut from the top of the field half-way down the slope, with no result, though conditions were again

favourable for tracing previous excavation. In addition to digging, I examined both of these fields when under corn crop, shortly before harvest, but could see no vegetation sign of a line of trench. The field to the north of the wood I have seen only in grass ; I have not been able to find any sign of a stronger growth of thistles indicating a trench, nor have I distinguished any surface inequalities of the ground. It is possible that, under certain conditions, examination from the air may reveal features that are not apparent from below.