

The Arbroath Antiquary Club's excavations at Castle Rock promontory fort, Auchmithie, Arbroath and Saint Vigeans, Angus District

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with a catalogue of the small finds by Joanna Close-Brooks†

ABSTRACT

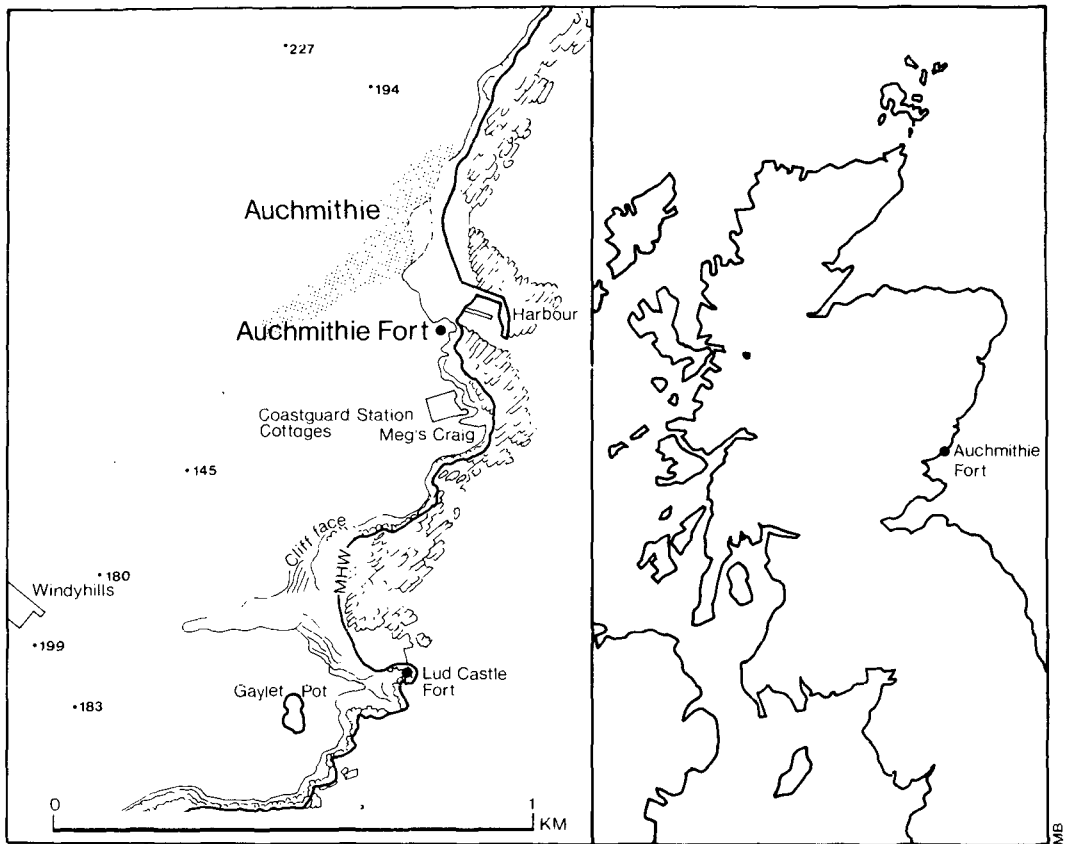
This report is based on the manuscript record compiled by the excavator, Mr D A Gardner, prior to his death. The evidence consists of structural features examined on the promontory itself as well as the character of the defences that cut the landward approach to the site. The best chronological evidence is provided by the artefacts recovered; whilst a wide date range is impossible to negate, the datable material suggests use in the early centuries AD.

THE SITE (illus 1, 2)

The diminutive promontory fort, named Castle Rock, dominates the harbour of the small fishing village of Auchmithie (illus.1). The site (NGR NO 683441) lies to the south-east of the cliff-top village, approximately mid-way between the track which winds down a meltwater feature to the harbour and the cottages of the former Coastguard Station at Meg's Craig. This sector of the Angus coastline, from Arbroath northwards, is well-known for its series of defended promontories, to which attention was first drawn in these *Proceedings* by Christison (1900, 59–60). Lamb (1980, fig 1) produces a map of those areas of the British coastline where such features are recorded. Whilst many of these sites are sea-girt, Castle Rock, Auchmithie sits on the landward side of the present storm beach and thus relied for its defence exclusively on the precipitous nature of the conglomerate cliffs which surround it, supplemented by man-made defences. This trait is shared by other Angus coastal promontories, in particular by Maiden Castle at Arbroath (Hogg 1975).

The site lies at a little above 30 m OD. Much of its perimeter (illus 2) is delimited by the presence of steep cliffs, but on the west, landward, side the site offers no natural topographic advantage. Here the terrain, except where it is dissected by steep-sided meltwater channels running approximately at right angles to the coastal edge, slopes gently seaward until the cliff line is reached. From the site it is possible to obtain a wide view over this area, now extensively cultivated and hence largely devoid of surface traces of archaeological sites. The set of promontory forts is thus the principal element of the local later prehistoric settlement mosaic to have survived as detectable up-standing remains, although the results of air photography elsewhere in Angus, but more especially in the lower valley of the Lunan Water (RCAMS 1978 and subsequent aerial sorties), permit the

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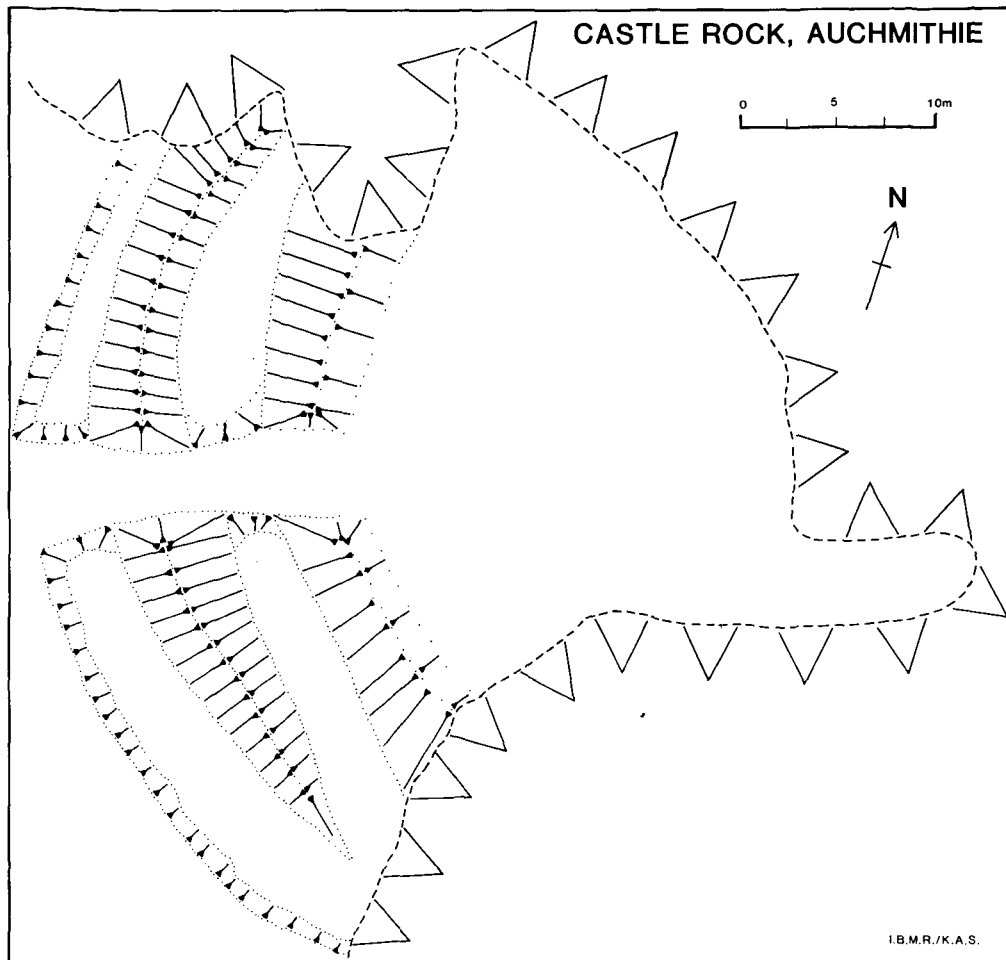


ILLUS 1 Angus coastline, showing position of Castle Rock, Auchmithie

suggestion that a similarly high density of sites may have occupied the landscape inland of Castle Rock.

The surface isolated by the defences at Castle Rock measures c 33 m N/S and c 30 m E/W. Reference to the plan (illus 2) makes it clear that both these figures represent maxima; the present configuration of the interior is sub-triangular in shape; and the overall area of the interior falls well within the range ascribed by the officers of the Royal Commission to duns (Maxwell 1969; RCAMS 1975, 18). Unless substantial erosion has occurred during the last two millennia, the usable internal area is further reduced by the inclusion of a narrow spine (included in the overall measurement) at the east end. This narrow projection may be paralleled at other Angus promontory forts, notably at West Mains of Ethie (Wilson 1980, fig 1) and at Lud Castle (Christison 1900); although none has been examined archaeologically, it seems a safe assumption that these geologically-controlled fingers of land are unlikely to have witnessed more than causal use – although it is conceded that the wider spine at Lud Castle may prove to be an exception.

As it presently survives, the bivallate system of defences that defines the western margin of the site has a relief amplitude of less than 2 m. Description of the defences may be conveniently couched in terms of a north and a south sector, divided by the causeway across the ditches and the corresponding path through the rampart lines. In the north sector, the banks and their external flat-bottomed



ILLUS 2 Plan of Castle Rock, Auchmithie

ditches appear to have been eroded by slumping. This process appears, however, to have had less impact at the south end, where the two ditches merge before the break-of-slope, marked by the debris which has slumped over the cliff, is reached. The excavator (in ms) raised the possibility of a third, outer, defensive line, now obliterated by ploughing, but there appears to be no solid support for this assertion. In plan, the system is markedly lunate and offers no surface indication of being the product of more than one constructional period. Likewise, there is nothing to suggest that the causeway which permits access to the interior is other than original.

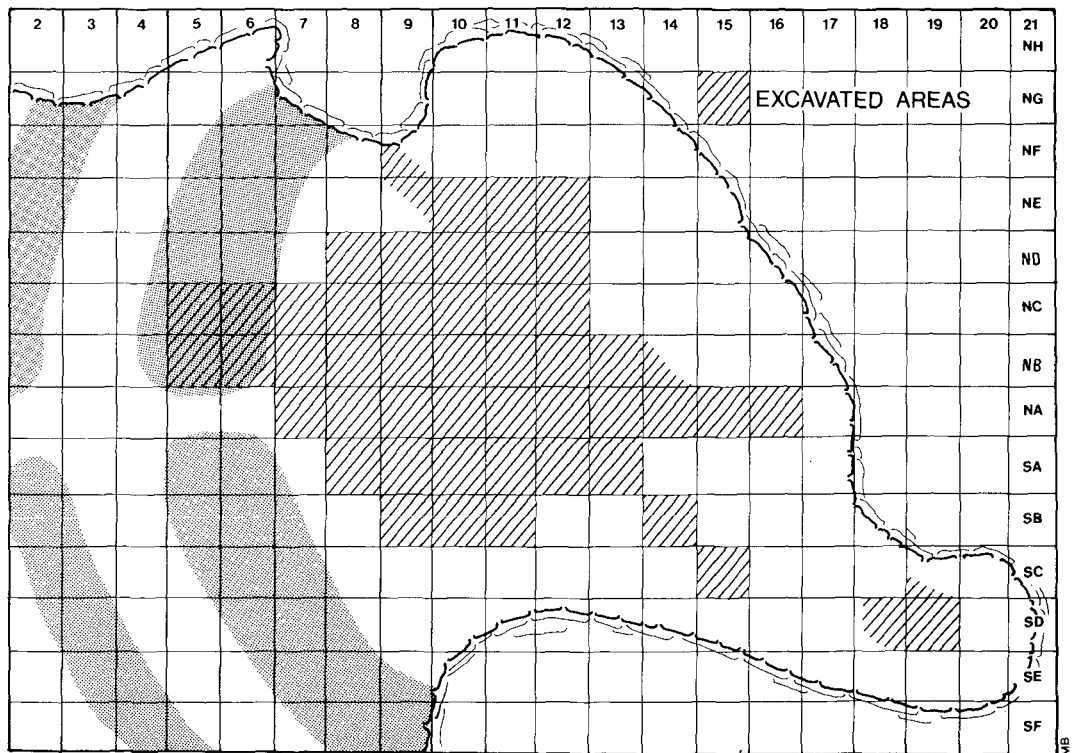
THE EXCAVATION: BACKGROUND INFORMATION (illus 3)

The site was excavated in the years after 1967 by the Arbroath Antiquary Club, under the leadership of the late Mr D A Gardner, MA, FSA Scot. The following report is based on a draft typescript prepared by Mr Gardner, on his notebooks, and on additional material located by Dr Close-Brooks in Dundee Museum. The excavations took place with the kind permission of Col and

Mrs D W M Morrison, of Windyhills Farm, Auchmithie, and with a small grant from the Cobb Trust; this enabled tools to be purchased. Apart from members of Arbroath Antiquary Club, pupils of the High School and Academy at Arbroath participated in the excavation, particularly in the seasons from 1969 to 1971. The site was scheduled in 1969, and excavations thereafter were conducted with the permission of the Ancient Monuments Board. The 1974 season seems to have been intended as the final campaign. All the archival material relating to the site is housed in the National Monuments Record, 54 Melville Street, Edinburgh; the finds are in the Signal Tower Museum, Arbroath. A new plan of the site was prepared with the assistance of Mrs K A Sabine.

The excavation was conducted originally in a pattern of grid squares, measuring 5 by 5 ft (c 1.5 by 1.5 m), separated by baulks, each 3 ft (c 1 m) in width. By 1969, 29 such squares had been examined down to the level at which some structural features, and elements of a pebble floor, were recognized. This appears to represent the main layer recognized in the excavation and is described as Horizon D. Surface examination suggests that many of these box excavations were subsequently amalgamated by the removal of the intervening baulks, such that a substantial proportion of the interior of the site, nearly all that could be examined without recourse to elaborate safety procedures, was tackled. An undated sketch accompanying the archival material indicates that 52 boxes were ultimately examined (illus 3).

This grid of 8 by 8 ft (c 2.45 by 2.45 m) squares, established over the entire site from a base line laid out along the west-east axis, formed the basis of the on-site reference system. Squares were designated by a code of two letters and two digits. The first letter, either S or N, designated whether



ILLUS 3 Base line, grid system and boxes examined .

the box lay south or north of the baseline; the second letter, A to H, marks the distance of the box from this baseline, A being closest. The easting is provided by a numeral, from 1 to 21, which increased from an origin point immediately west of the causeway across the outer ditch. Thus a reference 'SA 10' designated the square 0–5 ft south of the base-line, and 45–50 ft east of the origin point. The small finds are all recorded with reference to this grid.

Prior to excavation, the site was overgrown with whins and grass which were established in a thin soil. This in turn capped a till deposit, some 2 m thick, that overlay the Old Red Sandstone conglomerate which forms the bedrock strata. The topsoil, less than 15 cm thick, was described as 'sandy but darkened with humus'; root penetration into the subjacent clay was recorded. It became clear during the excavation that the site had in places suffered severely from erosion; this problem seems particularly to have afflicted the north-eastern portion of the area examined. The site appears to have escaped both cultivation and damage from Second World War gun emplacements, which Gardner records as having been placed on or near it. He also noted a restricted patch of waterlogging, directly behind the inner rampart, but this does not seem to have led either to excavation problems or to favourable artefactual preservation. The excavation appears to have eliminated this problem of water retention, by altering the drainage characteristics of the site.

Like many coastal promontories, Castle Rock is an exposed place, in which the effects of erosion are likely to counteract those of deposition. Localized natural attrition has already been noted; the excavator was, however, of the view that the surface characteristics of the site can have altered little since its abandonment.

THE RESULTS OF THE EXCAVATION (illus 4–6)

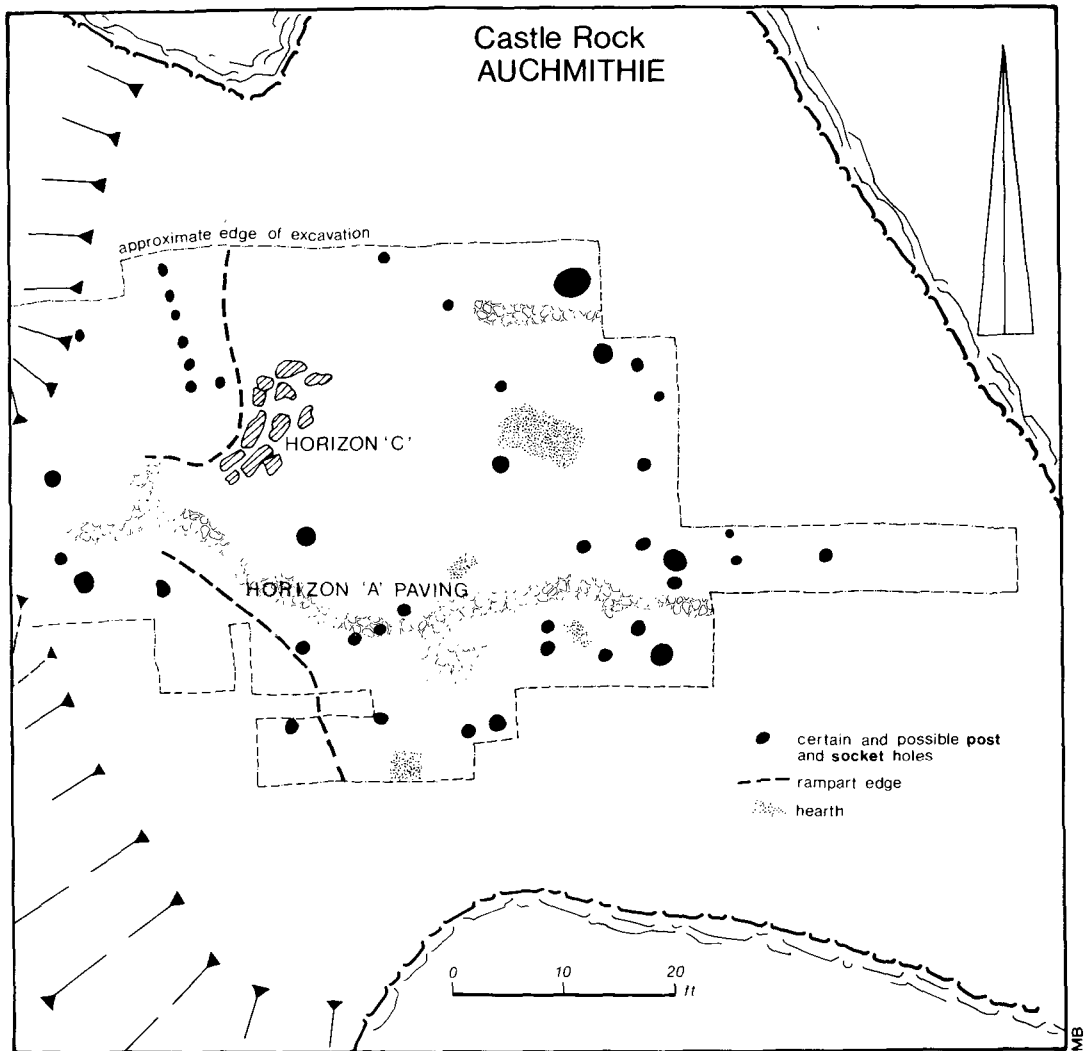
(a) THE INTERIOR

In the excavation of the interior of the site, various layers, described as occupation horizons, were encountered. Because of the problems noted above, and because of the likelihood of subsequent robbing, these could not always be readily distinguished. None of these layers produced a sealed assemblage of datable artefacts. The following discussion retains Gardner's terminology for the layers and features which were noted (illus 4).

Horizon A

Recovered in boxes NA 7–10, NB 8, and SA 10–12, this consisted of a raised path, made up for the most part of angular sandstone fragments, which gave the impression of having been broken by a sledge-hammer. This angular material appears to have been bottoming, since flat, water-worn stones, perhaps collected from the beach, formed a paved surface overlying this feature in a number of places. Such was the case in box SA 11; elsewhere these flat stones had tumbled off the bottoming and became embedded in Horizon D. Broken sandstones, akin to those mentioned above, were also noted as lying scattered over a number of adjacent squares, but in decreasing quantities as distance from the path increased. Once inside the enclosed area, this path seems to have curved to the south: Gardner suggested that it led towards boxes SA 13, NA 13 and NB 13, where postholes (eg PH 9 and PH 17; see below), dug into the till, may conceivably have been contemporary with the pathway. The path is noted to have traversed the waterlogged area immediately east of the inner rampart.

The typescript report gives no indication of the antiquity of this feature, beyond indicating that the angular debris of the path itself included 'some broken stone fragments of earlier date'. Amongst finds embedded in the path are several believed appropriate to the earlier occupation. Stratigraphically, Horizon A overlay Horizon B; but the recovery of some of the paving stones from this path on Horizon D provides an illustration of the thinness of the deposits.



ILLUS 4 Simplified version of site plan prepared by Mr Gardner, showing: the general line of the Horizon A pathway; the extent of the slabs defining Horizon C; the position of the palisade line relative to the inner rampart; and the position of various hearths

Horizon B

Restricted to box NA 8, this consisted of a layer of cobbling, made of small rounded stones averaging 7–10 cm in diameter. It underlay Horizon A, but was not definitely separable from Horizon D, described below. A photograph in the site archive suggests that these two fine cobbled horizons may have been approximately 10 cm apart at one point.

Horizon C

Again of limited extent, this layer was described as a floor, made of large, flat, water-worn and geologically-varied stones. A sketch in the site records suggests that some of these stones measured

c 30 by c 20 cm. There were no indications of any associated walling or postholes. The description of this feature as 'curving round the inner side of the inner rampart' strongly suggests that it post-dates this feature. Horizon C was recognized in boxes NB 9 and NC 9: thus it could not be related stratigraphically to either of the Horizons previously discussed. It did, however, clearly overlie Horizon D, and is noted as having been separated from the latter by a thin layer of organic matter.

Horizon D

This was the most extensive of the layers noted. It was recovered in boxes (from north to south) NC 9–12, NB 8–12, NA 8–12, SA 9–12, and SB 10–11. Horizon D was located between 15 and 50–60 cm below the level of the turf. The layer was described as a 'crude mosaic floor', which, when matched with the photographic record, is a fair description for what appears to have been a well-laid pebble floor. This consisted of small stones, many less than 3 by 3 cm, seemingly brought up from the beach, and pressed into a pre-dug, sub-circular, flat-bottomed depression, which was recessed by some 25 cm into the upper surface of the underlying till. The overall dimensions of this feature are given as 14.60 m N/S by 9.75 m E/W. The pebbling is noted as extending in an enclave into the boxes on the SB line. This pebbling was intermittently sealed by a 'dark, greasy layer, never more than 1 cm thick'; this deposit, taken to represent a layer formed after the destruction of a building which occupied this part of the site, was presumed to have been eroded away elsewhere. At a slightly higher level, but only very locally represented (in a box NB 8 in particular) were further traces of similar pebbling; this is recorded as having overlain the clay of the rampart.

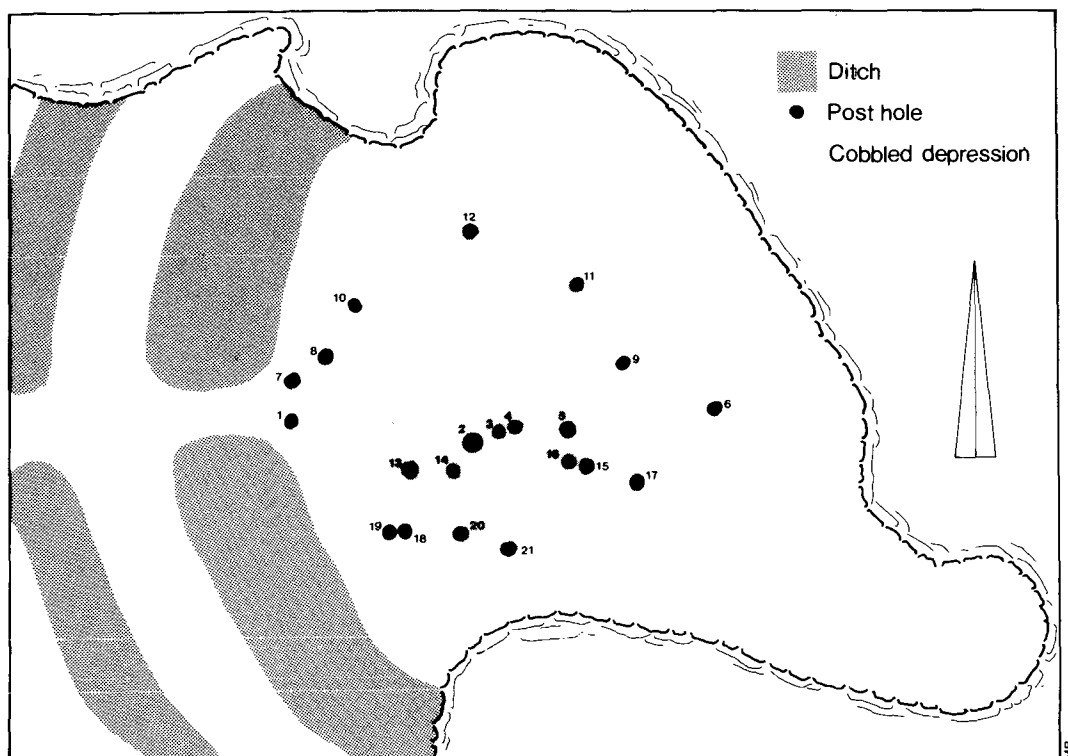
From this sunken area, the pebbling continued west across boxes NA 8 and NA 7. Here, this layer sloped upward towards the entrance gap in the inner rampart. Gardner associated this with a gateway in the defences. The evidence for such an arrangement appears to have consisted of postholes recovered at the inner end of the causeway and on top of the inner rampart. Sadly, it is impossible to pronounce definitively on this apparent association. The plan record of the postholes near the entrance causeway is insufficiently precise to tie them to this pebbling. The recovery of a further posthole on top of the rampart is more likely to refer to some form of breastwork.

Associated with the pebble floor of Horizon D were various postholes and hearths: an early report (*Discovery Excav Scot 1970*, 2) also mentioned clay walls, but their presence seems subsequently to have been discounted in favour of the depression, mentioned above. Unfortunately, Mr Gardner had not completed writing up the post- and socket-holes at the time of his death. Thus the following account should be treated with particular caution. There does not appear to be any surviving stratigraphic account to support the association of these features with Horizon D; none the less, it is clear that the excavator felt that the link between the majority of the postholes listed below and the dished pebble floor was secure, since the archive material includes reconstruction drawings based on this evidence.

The following list is based on sketches, some accompanied by marginal notes, in the site notebooks and on working drawings (illus 4 & 5) Mr Gardner had prepared as a preliminary to interpretation. Since many of the measurements recorded below are clearly approximations, they have not been converted to metric units. Depths, where available, appear to have been measured from the surface of the cobbling.

Postholes and associated features

- PH 1, box NA 7; depth 6", diameter c 12": near rampart causeway.
- PH 2, box NA 10; depth ?, diameter c 6".
- PH 3, box NA 11; depth 5", 8" by 2".
- PH 4, box NA 11; depth 4", 3" by 2".



ILLUS 5 Working sketch of the suite of postholes and the edge of the cobbled depression of Horizon D

PH 5, box NA 12; depth 5", diameter 10".

PH 6, box NA 15; depth 7", diameter 10": remote from Horizon D.

PH 7, box NB 7; depth ?, diameter c 14": makes a pair with PH 1.

PH 8, box NB 7; depth ?, 9" by 7".

PH 9, box NB 13; depth ?, diameter c 6": outside Horizon D floor.

PH 10, box NC 8; depth ?, diameter c 6": associated with rampart?

PH 11, box NC 12; depth ?, diameter c 5": in this square, a wall overlay the mosaic floor.

PH 12, box ND 10; depth ?, diameter ? c 6": on margin of pebble floor.

PH 13, box SA 9; depth 5", diameter 6".

PH 14, box SA 10; depth 9", diameter 6".

PH 15, box SA 12; depth 3", diameter 4".

PH 16, box SA 12; depth 6", diameter 9".

PH 17, box SA 13; depth 9", diameter 10".

PH 18, box SB 9; depth 15", diameter 14".

PH 19, probably box SB 8; no details; beyond margin of pebble floor.

PH 20, box SB 10; no details.

PH 21, box SB 11; depth ?, diameter c 4".

PH unnumbered; box NB 11; depth 5", diameter 10": found in 1973.

Mr Gardner suggested that the majority of these posts once supported a substantial timber post-ring house, with its eaves extending beyond the area of the pebble floor. Whilst such a reconstruction is feasible on the basis of the above listing of possible vertical elements, it is felt that it would be uncritical, in the state that the record has survived, categorically to endorse this suggestion. None the less, the presence of hearths (although no structural details of them are recorded) advocates the former provision of roofed shelter in this area, as does the domestic character of some of the associated debris. The best-documented hearth area, in box SB 10, measured about 0.9 by 0.6 m. Whilst this example lay towards the southern margin of the pebble-floored depression, further hearths were certainly located within it (illus 6); one was noted in box SA 12, for example (see SF 13).

In sum, it is possible to interpret the upright elements recorded by Mr Gardner in terms of a series of windbreaks, perhaps delimiting the cobbling and the hearths. Discounting the sparseness of the excavation evidence, it is certainly possible to envisage a single circular structure based on the majority of the postholes. For this, PHs 1 and 7, if not related to a gate at the inner margin of the inner rampart, could represent the posts of a porch. This pair of postholes were certainly the biggest found, and their scale would accord with either of the proposed functions. Pursuing the idea of a circular building clockwise from the proposed porch, PHs 8, 10, 12, 11, 9, 15 and 20 are disposed around a circle about 45 ft (c 15 m) in diameter. Certain of these postholes form opposing pairs: PHs 10 and 15, 12 and 20 are the clearest examples; PH 9 is opposite the proposed porch. Clearly, for this to have been a satisfactory structure, further postholes would be required around the circumference. Where dimensions of these postholes are known, they appear adequate (with the possible exception of PH 15) for structural elements. Porches are infrequent features of Scottish Iron-Age round houses, but it is conceivable that this arrangement was employed here to anchor the structure to the rear of the rampart. Such a course of action may have been advisable in the light of wind velocities on the headland. In this regard, the sunken floor of the proposed building may have been a device designed to minimize the roof height. Such an arrangement is not paralleled as far as the writer is aware in the repertory of excavated Scottish Iron-Age timber round-houses, although such dishing has been recognized as a by-product of the periodic cleaning-out and rebuilding of houses in the 'hut-circle' tradition. However, it is not impossible that the hollow is chronologically separate from the postulated circular building; if its excavation were subsequent to the destruction of the timber house, this process would account for the disruption to the earlier structure. It should be clear that much of the above oversteps what can be said, with any measure of certainty, on the basis of Mr Gardner's surviving notes.

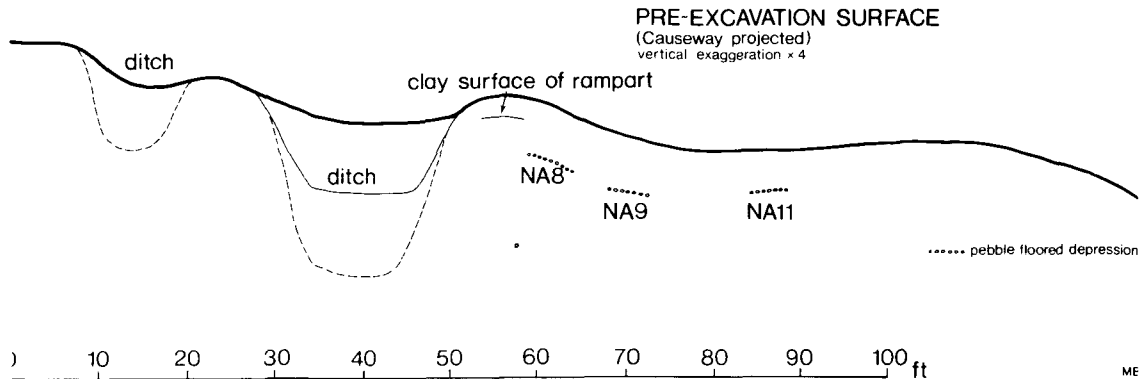
A number of small finds can be associated securely with Horizon D: others are less certainly related to this, the earliest recognized feature on site. Many of the problems ensue from the shallowness of the deposits, which clearly caused the excavator difficulties in assigning some of the artefacts to particular horizons. This difficulty is a recurrent one in promontory fort excavations.

Other features

At the very exposed point of the promontory, in box SD 19, a circular cobbled floor, some 2.44 m in diameter, was exposed. This lay very near the surface, and differed in the materials used from that examined above in Horizon D. There were no traces of postholes nor of wall-construction associated with it.

(b) THE DEFENCES (illus 6)

The examination of these features appears to have been very restricted in extent, with the exception of the internal face of the inner rampart north of the causeway. The detail that was noted may be summarized as follows:



ILLUS 6 Profile of the site along the baseline, showing the causeway across the inner ditch, and its excavated profile. The reference 'SB 2' is the only record of the sectioning of this feature

Boxes NC 8 and ND 8

Here a row of some 10 water-worn and geologically-varied stones was recovered. These stood in sockets within a shallow trench, some 25 cm wide, on the upper part of the inner slope of the inner rampart. They appear to have served as chocking for timber uprights. The excavator noted that the alignment of this composite feature, which measured c 3.15 m in length, differed from that of all others noted on the site. It was suggested that this feature, along with the single posthole recorded in box NA 7 (PH 1 above), may have represented a breastwork or stockade on this inner defensive line. This interpretation seems reasonable, except perhaps for PH 1. Evidence for the existence of a posthole in an equivalent position (PH 7 in box NB 7) has been employed above to propose either a gate or a porch for the hypothesized round-house.

Box ND 7

Gardner noted a single posthole on the summit of the rampart here. This was suggested as evidence for an additional line of palisading which crowned the rampart. No record of this feature has been located in the site papers (although it appears on one plan) and it is thus possible that confusion has arisen, since there was certainly a post in box NB 7 (PH 7 above). However, illus 4 shows a posthole in box ND 7. Both PH 7 and PH 1 (in box NA 7) have tentatively been suggested to indicate the former presence of a gate across the causeway, or a house-porch; however, Gardner expressly noted that PH 1 overlay the rampart, which would contradict such a view by making PHs 1 and 7 relate to distinct episodes relative to the construction of the rampart.

Box NB 6

The outer face of the inner rampart was examined, apparently only superficially, here. This is described as possessing a smooth clay surface, on which a few stones had been laid. The excavator thought that these had been placed in position; however, it is possible that they represent tumble from some work which formerly crowned the summit of the inner wall line.

Boxes ND 5 and ND 6

A limited section across the inner ditch was excavated here. The original profile is suggested to have been steep-sided, with a flat bottom c 1 m in width. The vertical distance from ditch bottom to rampart summit is suggested to have been of the order of 4.25 m. Whilst such a configuration is

certainly possible, various comments in the excavation record hint at the possibility that this ditch may have been over dug. First, the ditch bottom is recorded as having been at the level of the bedrock. Second, recognizable silting in the ditch only extended to a depth of 1 m. No finds were made in this 1 m wide cutting through the ditch.

The northern slope of the causeway across the inner ditch was examined in box NB 5. This indicated that it consisted of undisturbed till, thereby suggesting that the causeway is essentially natural, rather than a built feature across the ditch.

The outer work does not seem to have been examined during the excavation, though a profile (illus 6) indicates that its ditch may have been tackled in box SB 2. If so, there is no surviving account of this sondage.

THE FINDS

Joanna Close-Brooks

The finds from the excavation are mostly stone artefacts, but nevertheless they give some indication of the period when the promontory was occupied.

The cup-marked boulder, 1, is of Neolithic or early Bronze-Age date. The earliest cup-marked stone known at present is the slab found in the mortuary enclosure under the long barrow at Dalladies, Kincardineshire, dated to around 2600 bc (Piggott 1972, 35 & 44). This boulder, as with cup- or cup-and-ring-marked stones in local souterrains (cf Hurly Hawkin, Angus; Henshall 1982, 239, nos 116–17) will have been reused as building stone for the Iron-Age fort.

The quern rubber, 2, and fragment of another, 3, are the top stones used with saddle querns, and not so often recognized as the lower stones. Saddle querns were in use in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages (Close-Brooks 1983), but most of the examples known from south-east Scotland have come from Iron-Age or occasionally late Bronze-Age sites, many from large-scale recent excavations which are not yet fully published (including Broxmouth: Hill 1982; Dryburn Bridge: Triscott 1982; Douglasmuir: Kendrick 1982). The date at which saddle querns were replaced by rotary querns in Scotland is not yet precisely known, but may be in the first, second, or even third century BC.

These three large artefacts, the cup-marked stone and the two rubbers, could have been brought to the site as building stone, but more probably were found and used on the spot. The two quern rubbers may therefore relate to an early Iron-Age occupation on the promontory, but whether this was contemporary with any phase of the defences is unknown.

Other small finds should belong to some phase of occupation on the promontory. The various pieces of sandstone with hollows or perforations in their surfaces may be compared with similar finds from Hurly Hawkin (Henshall 1982, nos 99–100, 178–82, etc). The small chipped stone discs 10–14, and the perforated disc 9, may again be compared with numerous examples from Hurly Hawkin discussed by Henshall (1982, 235), which were found in levels associated with the broch and the souterrain and which may date from the second and third centuries AD. Two related but finely polished discs were found at West Mains of Ethie in contexts perhaps of the first or second century AD. While such discs probably have a wider date range, they may indicate settlement at a similar time in the early centuries AD at Castle Rock. The fragment of flat rotary quern, 4, could be of similar date; it is most unlikely to date before the first century BC and could be later. Shale artefacts, such as 16, are often found on sites of the last few centuries BC and the early centuries AD.

The fragments of daub, 25–27, are interesting and more unusual on a native site. Clay has to be fired at a high temperature to turn it into 'burnt daub'. It appears that such temperatures are not usually reached when wattle-and-daub buildings burn down, but are the result of some domestic or industrial process using high temperatures, such as cooking, firing pottery or metalworking. The

daub from Castle Rock, with its wattle impressions, may therefore have come from a wattle-and-daub oven or furnace. The small piece of burnt and vitrified clay, 21, may be related.

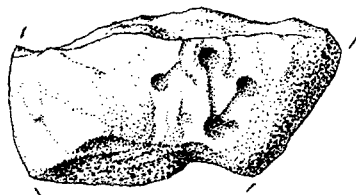
The more extensive excavation at West Mains of Ethie, the only other excavated 'cliff castle' in the series along the Angus coast, produced rather more datable finds (Wilson 1980). Some objects, such as the cup-and-ring-marked stone, fragments of flat rotary querns, a piece of sandstone with hourglass perforation and two polished stone discs are comparable to finds from Castle Rock. Most datable finds at West Mains of Ethie were from occupation in the first or second century AD, though how this related to the defences is not entirely clear. There are hints of occupation of a similar date at Castle Rock.

The later finds, medieval and later pottery 17-20, clay pipes 22-4, and three coins, not catalogued, of Victoria, Edward VII and George VI, will have been dropped by fishermen or casual visitors.

CATALOGUE (illus 7)

All the finds from the excavation have been housed in the Signal Tower Museum, Arbroath.

The bracketed number at the end of each entry here is the small finds number of the object in the site records. As more than one version of the finds list is known, the Horizon reference quoted here is the later one on the site in the event of the records being inconsistent. An exception is made for all items on which specific reference is made in the draft typescript report; for these, the excavator's remarks are followed.



ILLUS 7 Cup-and-ring marked stone (scale, 1:10)

Stone

- 1 Mr A MacLaren had kindly contributed the following description: a fragment (450 mm by 250 mm by 140 mm) of a waterworn boulder of medium-grained sandstone, probably of Lower Old Red Sandstone date, bearing five linked cups, one of them surrounded by a single ring which has been truncated by the fracture of the stone. The markings consist of: (1) a cup (35 mm diameter by 10 mm deep) with a gapped ring about 8 mm wide and 3 mm deep with an external diameter of 80 mm; from the cup a narrow radial groove leads outward between the terminals of the ring (30 mm apart) to (2) a second cup (30 mm diameter by 10 mm deep), having (3) a small satellite cup (18 mm diameter by 3 mm deep) tangential to it. Cup (2) is in turn connected by a thin shallow gutter, of similar size to the radial, to (4) a fourth cup (45 mm diameter by 12 mm deep). From the ring surrounding cup (1) a short groove leads to (5) a fifth cup (35 mm diameter by 5 mm deep). In addition, there are several tiny hollows and scars, including one near cup (2), which appear to be of relatively recent origin. (1) SA 9, 15 cm below turf, possibly from Horizon D. Illus 7.
- 2 Quern rubber of granite, 270 mm by 225 mm by 115 mm, the grinding surface worn and slightly convex. (?97) NA 15, 17 cm below turf.
- 3 Fragment of granite, possibly from a quern rubber, 190 mm by 122 mm; one face worn smooth. (?98) NA 9, in pathway of Horizon A.
- 4 Fragment of lower stone of a rotary quern, made from a micaceous coarse-grained stone, broken all round. Original diameter about 280 mm; thickness 35 mm. (59) NA 10, incorporated in pathway of Horizon A.

- 5 Rectangular block of red sandstone, 225 mm by 200 mm by 120 mm, split off on four sides and on the base, with a hollow 60 mm diameter and 32 mm deep roughly chipped into the top surface. Perhaps intended to be a socket stone. (35) incorporated in top of foundation of paved way; Horizon A.
- 6 Irregular rounded pebble of red sandstone, 160 mm by 145 mm by 53 mm, with hollow, 60 mm diameter, 20 mm deep, pecked into face. Probably a socket stone. (?101); if so, in pathway of Horizon A.
- 7 Fragment of a block of pink sandstone with part of a hollow sunk in one face, apparently artificially worked; 80 mm by 70 mm by 42 mm, hollow about 30 mm deep. (65) ND 8, described as Horizon D, but probably marginal to it in this box which included the palisade line.
- 8 Weathered subrectangular disc of sandstone; an irregular perforation is bored from both sides and offset so that it only just connects; 195 mm by 170 mm by 30 mm. (3) SA or SB 10 or 11, Horizon A.
- 9 Sub-triangular disc or micaceous grey sandstone, the edges rounded, with central perforation; 115 mm by 80 mm by 5 mm thick. (40) SA 10.
- 10 Disc of pink sandstone, chipped edges, 85 mm diameter, 10 mm thick. Perhaps (104); if so, no location, but associated with Horizon D.
- 11 Disc of pink sandstone, chipped edges, 80 mm diameter, 20 mm thick. No number. No location.
- 12 Disc of grey stone, chipped edges, 70 mm diameter, 10 mm thick. (14) NA 12, Horizon D.
- 13 Disc of grey sandstone, chipped edges, 55 mm diameter, 8 mm thick. (86) SA 12, near hearth – visible on *illus 4* – in Horizon D.
- 14 Disc of pink sandstone, chipped edges, 55 mm by 45 mm by 11 mm thick. (31) ND 12, attributed to Horizon D, which is otherwise not recorded as having extended this far north.
- 15 Part of a small sandstone pebble, the base broken away, with a hollow sunk in one face and penetrating the present bottom. The indentation displays incisions made by a pointed tool. Size, as preserved, 45 mm by 28 mm by 10 mm deep. (2) SB 11, possibly Horizon D, probably Horizon A.

Shale

- 16 Half of a perforated shale disc with rounded edges, 83 mm diameter, 12 mm thick; hourglass perforation. Perhaps (104). No location.

Pottery and fired clay

All the medieval pottery is recorded in the typescript report as having been recovered 'near the surface'. *SF 20*, found near a posthole, is perhaps the exception.

- 17 Rim of medieval jug in buff fabric with blackened areas, with stump of strap handle, thumb impression to side of handle. (12) NB 10, doubtfully Horizon D.
- 18 Sherd from shoulder of large vessel in grey fabric with black inner surface; olive green glaze with underglaze; comb decoration. (12) NB 10, doubtfully Horizon D.
- 19 Eleven small sherds of medieval pottery, white, pink or grey fabric, light yellow-green glaze, one sherd with traces of applied strips and blobs. (12) NB 10, doubtfully Horizon D.
- 20 Sherd of hard red fabric, speckled brown glaze, imitation stoneware, ? 18th–19th century. NA 11. Under stone above posthole 4: this context may belong to Horizon D.
- 21 Piece of clay burnt pink and heavily vitrified on one surface. (?22); if so, ND 12, Horizon D.

Clay pipes

All this material was recovered near the surface.

- 22 Bowl of pipe marked 'BALME/MILEEND'. Oswald (1975, 132) lists Paule Balme working at Mile End Wharf, London, 1832–66. (18) NC 12.
- 23 Bowl of pipe marked 'COWLAIR/COOP SOCIETY' with a railway engine; 20th century. No spur; in shape and size, may copy contemporary wooden pipes. (34) SB 10.
- 24 Damaged bowl of pipe, remaining part of stamp has 'DUNDEE' in a circle with a damaged pair of dividers and set square. Probably later than 1850. Also a few other fragments of bowls and stem. (17) NA 12, at depth of c 12 cm.

Daub

The daub is all fired hard and is made from a fine-grained clay, unlike the coarser daub familiar from Roman sites. The colour varies from red to dark brown. It has impressions of close-set wattles of about 10

to 14 mm diameter with others set at right angles. It occurs in small pieces, the largest 40 mm long. The finds listed here were made at depths ranging between 15 cm and 25 cm.

25 One fragment. (23) SB 10, Horizon D.

26 One fragment, with grain impressions in interior. (24) NA 10, Horizon D.

27 Thirty-five small fragments. (44-6) SB 10, Horizon D.

Metal

Both these items appear to have been associated with a 'later horizon'.

28 Lead shot, 16 mm diameter; very corroded. (13) NB/NC 11/12, very doubtfully Horizon D.

29 Small piece of lead slag. (28) NC 12.

DISCUSSION

The set of coastal promontory forts nearest to Castle Rock to have undergone sustained investigation in recent years lies along the southern shore of the Moray Firth. Their examination has provided considerable evidence for repeated use. Dundarg, near Rosehearty (Fojut & Love 1983), Castle Point, Troup (Greig 1970; 1972) and the Green Castle at Portknockie (Ralston 1978) have all produced indications, structural, artefactual, or both, of occupation during the last millennium bc and the first of our era. It is thus perhaps a reasonable assumption that the Angus promontory forts are also likely to produce intimation of multi-period use; Wilson's conclusions with respect to the excavation results from West Mains of Ethie (1980, 118) certainly point to such a possibility. Certain features at Castle Rock equally hint at a history of structural modifications on site; a case in point is offered by the upper paving in the interior, Horizon C; contrastingly the date of construction of the built path, Horizon A, is altogether less secure. Whilst the incorporation of artefacts in its bottoming merely provides a *terminus post quem*, the author's description of the tumbled paving from this context becoming incorporated in Horizon D suggests that the latter was still open, and may therefore be used to advocate a shorter chronological gap between the construction of these two features than might otherwise be advanced. Without more solid information, it is probably wise to reserve judgement.

Gardner considered that the majority of the internal features attributable to Horizon D betokened the former presence of a single substantial timber round-house, which nestled behind the defences. Rehearsal of the dimensions of the various postholes recovered in this area during the excavation advocates caution; these features were clearly varied in scale and their positions, relative to the dished hollow in which many were located, cannot be construed as offering strong support for the hypothesis. Wilson encountered similiar difficulties in detecting pattern in the internal arrangements at West Mains of Ethie (1980, 117); this site also produced evidence of a circular depression, but without an obvious association with sufficient post features clearly to demonstrate that it had been roofed. Other patterns of post on that site were interpreted as the remains of lean-to structures and canopies, some associated with hearths, and such an arrangement might also be proposed at Castle Rock. The slight indications of metalworking at Castle Rock would sit reasonably happily with such an interpretation. Finally, it is worth remarking that the achievement of building in timber and presumably thatch in such an exposed location, a prey to contrary winds and welling updraughts, is a tribute to the builders' engineering skills.

None the less, some of the other artefactual debris clearly suggest that occupation within the Castle Rock enceinte was domestic in character. It remains difficult to explain why such diminutive and hazard-ridden spurs of land were selected for occupation around the early centuries AD, taking the datable finds at their face value. Clearly, the lack of many locations topographically suited to defence in the vicinity may have been a contributory factor. Whilst Wilson's hypothesis (1980, 118) may not be

correct in its particulars, it is perhaps not far from the mark to suggest that the desperate remedy of inhabiting such windswept, steep-sided eyries is an indication of troubled circumstances prevailing at that time.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to Mrs Isobel M Hurley, Mr Gardner's daughter, for collecting the records and papers and for presenting them to the National Monuments Record of Scotland; to Dr J N G Ritchie for bringing this site and its records to our attention; to Mr G H Collins, Institute of Geological Sciences, Edinburgh, for his assistance in assessing the geology of *SF1*; and to Mr A MacLaren for his comments on that object. Thanks are due to Mrs K A Sabine for her help in preparing the site survey. Much assistance with the interpretation of the possible round-house was received from Mrs D M Reynolds; the discussion presented in the above report is, however, the responsibility of the author. The illustrations were prepared in the drawing offices of NMAS, RCAHMS (Mr J N Stevenson), the Department of Geography at Aberdeen University, and the Department of Archaeology at Edinburgh University. Illus 7 is *Crown Copyright*, RCAHMS.

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