

Excavations at Kerse, East Polmont, Stirlingshire, July 1963

N McCord* and the late J Tait

In the *Proceedings* of this Society for 1955-6 Mr R Feachem drew attention to an earthwork just N of the main A9 road a short distance E of Polmont (NGR NS 943788). Aerial photographs taken by Professor St Joseph showed more of the character of the site, which appeared as a typical Roman camp, with an extension or annexe at its SE corner. The E side of this extension does not appear in these photographs, for reason which will become clear below. The construction of M9 at this point has destroyed most of this southern extension, while only slightly affecting the main camp. Before work began the area of the extension was examined during two weeks in July 1963 (fig 1-2).

The site lies on a small hill, the most westerly of a group of similar hills which stretches on both sides of the main road to the E of Polmont. The western slopes are much less steep than the eastern slopes. A large area was uncovered on the top of the hill, but there was no sign of any structures. A number of post-holes was found, but they are almost certainly remains of old fence lines; of varying but never very substantial depth, they contained nothing but fragments of clay pipes and pottery clearly of the 19th-20th centuries. A trench was cut on the W slope of the hill where one of the aerial photographs seemed to suggest the possibility of a building, but again there was no sign of any structure in that area.

The main object was to examine the SE and SW corners of the ditch around the extension to determine its character, and if possible to find dating evidence.

In the SW area the turn in this ditch was found and examined. The ditch proved to be of a normal V-shaped type (fig 3), and Roman pottery was discovered in the ditch filling.

The first trench cut to find the SE turn of the ditch was a little too far to the N for this purpose, and instead uncovered an entirely unexpected cemetery area, occupied by a number of closely grouped graves; some were quite substantial tombs constructed of stones, but others were simple holes in the ground without lining or covering. In the comparatively small area of burials which was uncovered, eight graves were found, of which four were stone built. Only the two most substantially constructed contained recognisable skeletal fragments. No dating evidence was associated with these burials. The only clue as to their date was that a re-used dressed stone was employed in one of them; this stone does not resemble Roman building stones, and the likelihood is that these graves are post-Roman in date.

A little to the S of this area the ditch was picked up again running along the S side of the annexe or extension, and its SE corner was traced in a series of trenches. Along the S side the

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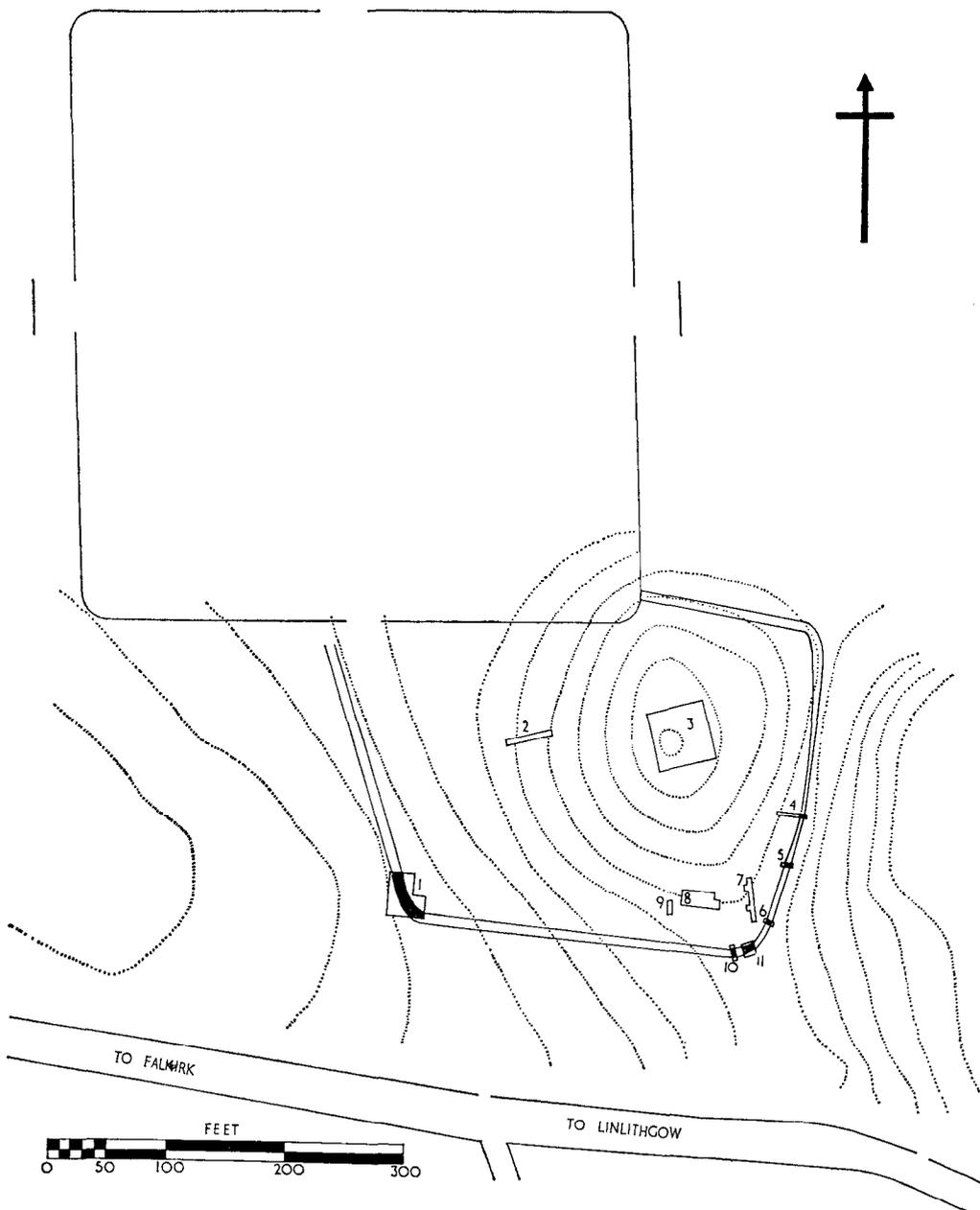


FIG 1 Kerse: Roman temporary camp and annexe. Contours at 4 ft intervals

ditch is very similar to its profile at the SW corner, with quite a sharp V-form. There were no traces of silting in the ditch, except for a small amount of sand and gravel in the bottom which must represent the inevitable trickle down the sides after cutting in such material. No Roman pottery was found here, the only find being a small scrap of native pottery of Iron Age type found in the very bottom of the ditch filling just to the N of the SE corner. The ditch - or trench - along the E side of the area of the extension or annexe is very peculiar in form; it runs along the

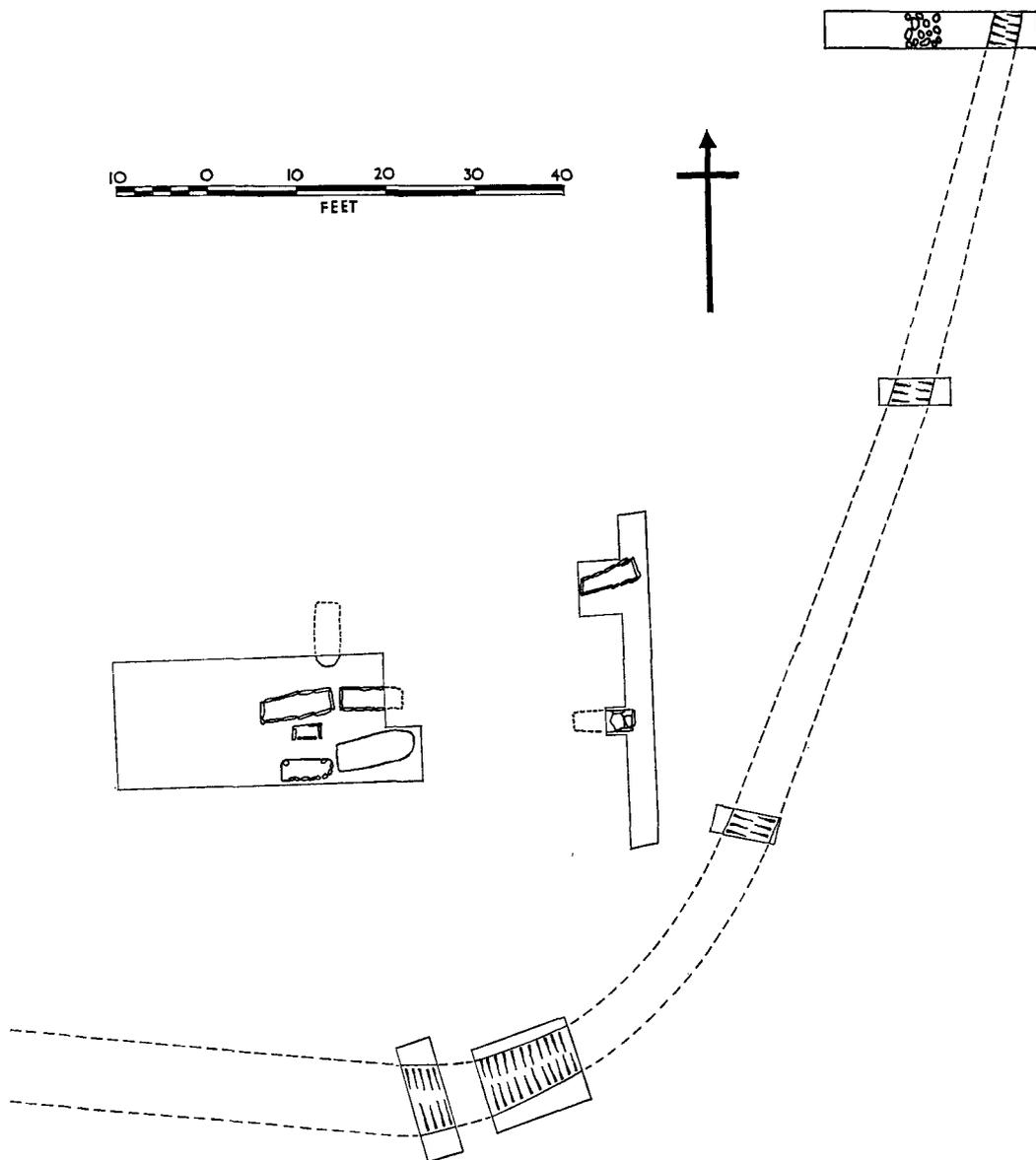
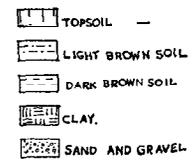
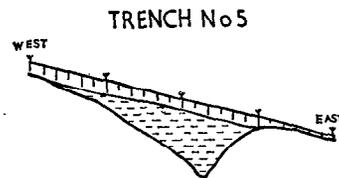
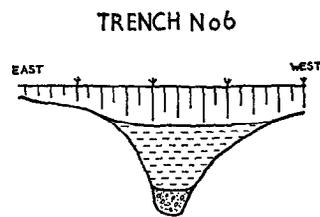
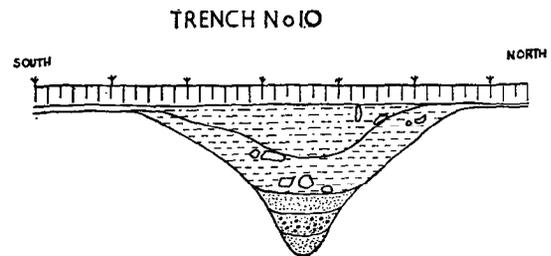
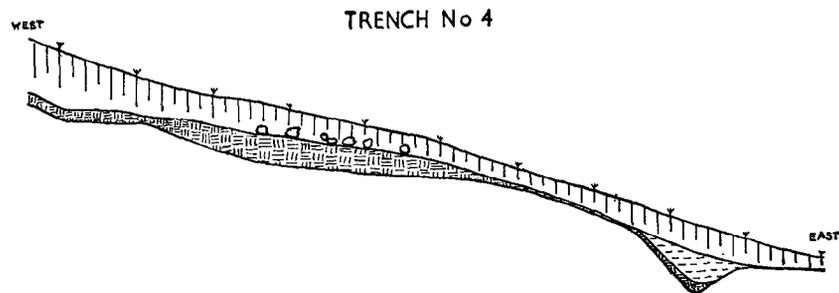


FIG 2 Kerse: SE corner of annexe

steep eastern slope of the hill, about half way down the slope, and very markedly diminishes in size as it runs N, until it is only a small trench.

Nothing was found to suggest long or intensive use of this site. The paucity of finds, and the evidence from the ditch, both suggest brief tenure. As to the date of the structure the evidence is meagre indeed, but there is one clue in the small group of Roman pottery found in the ditch filling at the SW corner. It is not at first sight a useful group, but Mr Gillam has contributed some helpful comments on it. For the most part it consists of pieces of one or more amphorae of the globular S Spanish type, which were produced in both the first and second centuries AD and are therefore of little help here. However, the group also includes a few small fragments of a type of



Kerse: Ditch sections

lid which is also represented by an example in an early Antonine deposit at Mumrills (Gillam 1961, 126, No 90). This is of course a tenuous indication, for such a type might have a long life. Nevertheless, for what it is worth this is the only dating evidence and it suggests that the extension, and the camp to which it is attached, should be regarded as Antonine in date.

This report was completed in 1974, but circumstances beyond the control of the authors have since delayed its publication.

REFERENCE

Gillam, J P 1961 'The Coarse Pottery', in Steer, K A 'Excavations at Mumrills Roman fort, 1958-60', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 94 (1960-1), 86-132.

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