

Wallstale Dun, Polmaise, Stirling

by James K. Thomson

The dun at Wallstale occupies the SE. end of a ridge on the SW. facing escarpment of the Fir Park massif some two miles to the SE. of the town of Stirling. The ground slopes gradually on the SE. to the valley of the Bannock Burn, whereas to the SW. there is an abrupt descent formed by the edge of the escarpment, before the land begins to climb up to the E. end of the outlying spurs of the Gargunnoch Hills. To the N. and NE. the site is overlooked by the steadily ascending slopes of the Fir Park which reach a height of over 500 ft. on the Gillies Hill. Although at present the dun is screened by trees, it would provide a view down the Bannock Burn valley to the lower reaches of the Forth. It is in a position to cover an E-W. route using the valley, where it passes through a gap of about 450 yds. between the Fir Park on the N. and the mass of the Sauchie Craig to the S.

The site of the dun (NS 774909) is 160 yds. N. of the cottage of Wallstale, by which name it is referred, at a height of just over 400 ft. O.D.¹ Remains on the ground show the structure to be an oval in plan, measuring 46 ft. 6 in. by 42 ft. 3 in. internally surrounded by a stone wall about 11 ft. thick. Stretches of the wall may be traced for just under two-thirds of its perimeter, a great deal of the SW. sector having slid down the escarpment; while on the E. half, the external facing blocks are visible in some places for three or four courses. The inner face is exposed only for a short distance on the ENE., while the interior is quite featureless. The entrance to the dun is indicated by a dip on the wall on the ESE. side. To the NW. protection is provided by a rock cut ditch which crosses the ridge and cuts off the dun from the ground above it. This ditch measures 26 ft. in width at the top and the scarp is 5 ft. 6 in. in depth. On each side of the mound of the dun is scattered rubble of quartz dolerite of which the structure was built on bed rock of the same material.

In 1955 the dun at Castle Hill Wood, barely a mile and a half W. of Wallstale was excavated, and finds suggested it was occupied during or between the periods of Roman penetration of the area in the first and second centuries.² As Wallstale might be one of the same series of duns in the neighbourhood as Castle Hill Wood, it was chosen for examination. The possibility existed of establishing more precisely the date of the series, confirming or not the evidence from Castle Hill Wood and providing a comparison of the structures and their associated artifacts.

Two seasons of work, in June 1965 and June 1967, were carried out at Wallstale by members of the Stirling Field and Archaeological Society, assisted by staff and pupils from Stirling High School. Among those who helped, special thanks are due to Miss D. Hunter for assistance in recording and the loan of equipment; Mr B. Welde for survey work on the site and Mr R. Roddam who made a photographic record of the entrance passage.

¹ RCAMS, *Stirlingshire* (1963), Vol. 1, No. 88, p. 82, fig. 22.

² *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.* xc (1956-7), 24 ff.

THE EXCAVATION

Investigation was concentrated on a piece of wall on the NE. sector, where surface indications pointed to fairly substantial remains, with the adjoining area of the interior and the outer slope of the dun, and the area of the entrance on the ESE. (fig. 1).

A trench was cut across the wall in the NE. sector to include the wall itself, some of the interior area and the outer slope of the dun (fig. 2). The wall measured 11 ft. wide and was formed of outer and inner facing blocks with a filling of pitched stones. The outer facing-stones were large boulders resting directly on the bedrock, with small stones wedged under their front, bottom edges, to counteract any tendency to bulge outwards. Only one course of wall face, 1 ft. 8 in. high, was preserved at this point. The inner face, 2 ft. 4 in. high, still retained three courses of stonework (rough boulders, generally not so massive as those on the outer face). The core of the wall with its loose filling of pitched stones showed no signs of layering. Some stones were roughly flattened on opposite faces, being about 8 in. thick on average.

The SW. end of the same trench disclosed some of the internal features of the dun. A space of 2 ft. 3 in., filled with small angular pieces of stone, separated the inner face of the wall from a stone edge 1 ft. wide beyond which lay an area of stone flags. The flat stones were irregular in shape, but laid to form a fairly even surface like a pavement or floor at a depth of 15 in. from the surface. The slabs, 3½ in. thick on average, rested on knobs of natural rock with an occasional prepared stone laid in between the points of rock to provide further support. Some rough dressing was evident and to ensure stability, small stone wedges, measuring for example 5 by 2½ by 2 in., had been carefully packed in a vertical position between some of the slabs. The flagged area was traced for some 18 ft. in a SW. direction and reached a point where the slabs ran up to and formed an edge with the natural rock. This paving lined up with the entrance and extended towards the inner end of the entrance passage.

On the outer slope of the dun, the only features of note were three apparently natural 'terraces'. The first and highest one was on a level with the packing stones beneath the large outer facing blocks at the base of the wall. Below the third 'terrace', the bedrock was exposed.

The entrance area on the ESE. part of the dun was examined. The entrance (Pl. 7) was formed by a passage paved for the inner two-thirds of its length, with a step at top and bottom, and a pair of door-checks in the side walls near the bottom step. The passage measured 15 ft. 7 in. in its length along the N. side, and 15 ft. 3 in. on the S. Its width at the outer end was 3 ft., becoming 3 ft. 6 in. at the door-checks from which point it gradually opened out to 4 ft. 8 in. at the inner end. Lying on the passage floor against its S. side at 3 ft. 7 in. from the inner end was a stone (broken in two) measuring 3 ft. 10 in. long, 1 ft. 3 in. wide and 8 in. deep, which formed a blocking or narrowing device. The blocking stone had been held in position with three stone wedges set beneath it and resting on the passage slabs. The outer 5 ft. of the passage floor consisted of the natural rock surface, while the remainder was made of slabs set closely together, sloping down from the interior of the dun. The slabs continued through the inner end of the passage to meet a step on the edge of the paved area of the interior previously mentioned. This step had a companion in the passage way marking the end of the paved portion at 5 ft. 5 in. from the outer end.

The N. side wall stood to a height of 1 ft. 8 in. in four courses at one part. The door-check on this side projected 3 in. into the passage (Pl. 7b). By contrast the S. side consisted mainly of the base blocks of the wall with the door-check projecting for 6 in. The pair of checks could have held a door whose bottom edge would have sat 4 in. from the outer lip of the bottom step when in position. Search was made for possible barholes in the side walls, but the only evidence for such

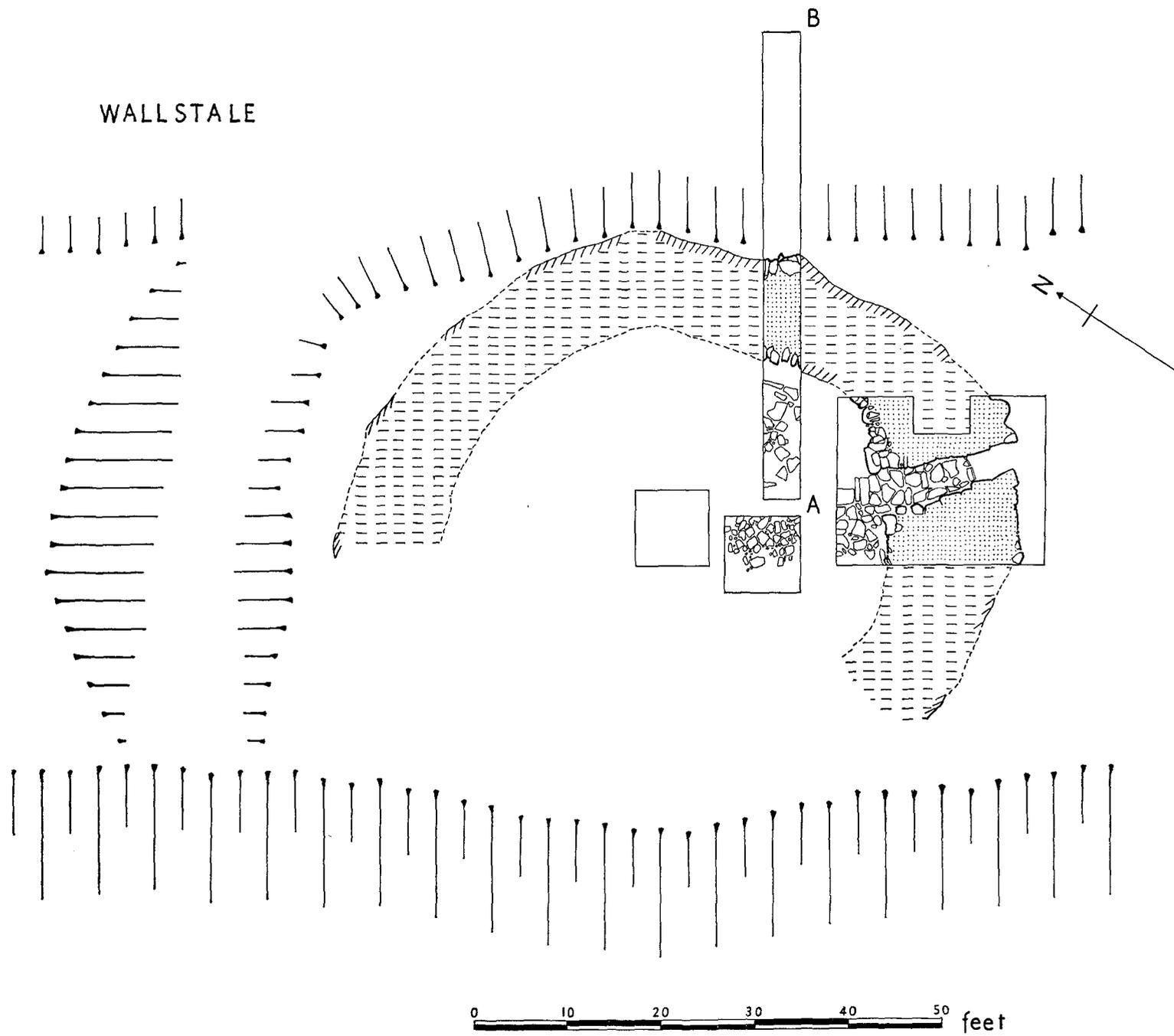
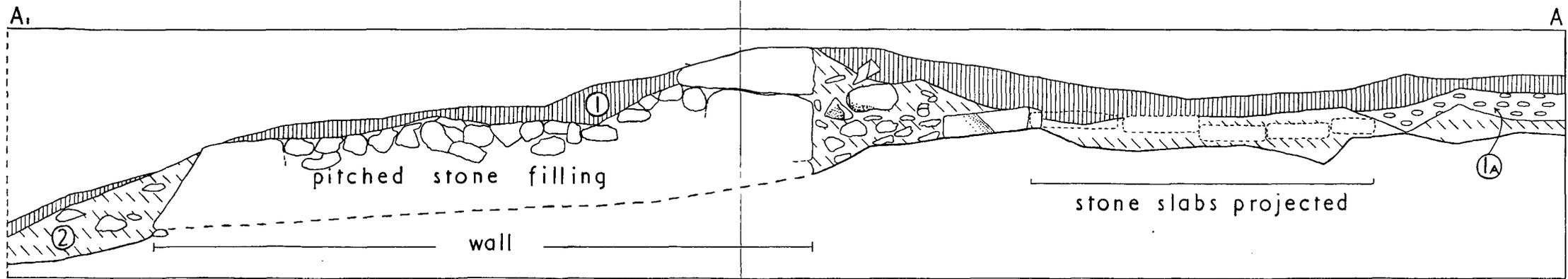


FIG. 1. Wallstale: plan.



WALLSTALE

Section A-B

- ① topsoil
- ①A tumble of stone
- ② brownearth & rubble

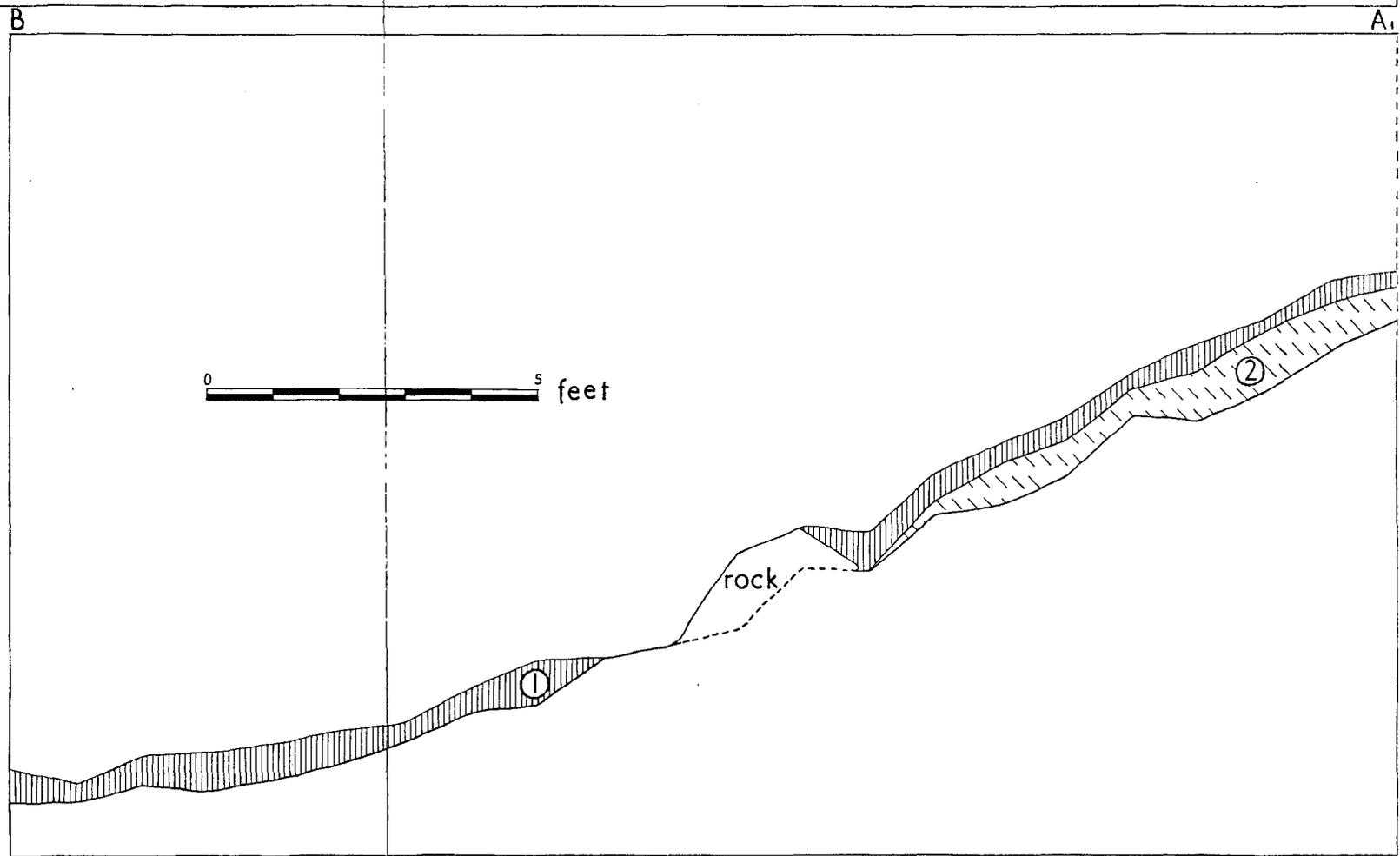


FIG. 2. Wallstale: section through wall of dun.

was a slot on the N. side. The door-check formed one edge of the hole which was 3 in. wide, 9½ in. high and 1 ft. 5 in. deep. The corresponding slot on the S. side was not preserved.

Finds of artifacts were meagre. A piece of iron slag, a fragment of a bun-shaped rotary quern stone and part of a saddle quern were found on the outer slope of the dun among rubble. Lying outside the edge of the interior paving was a sandstone slab bearing a groove on its surface, possibly a needle sharpener; while a pebble pounder with abrasions on the ends was recovered from tumble above the paving.

The absence of occupation material such as post holes, hearths, pottery etc., and in fact the general 'cleanness' of the site was noticeable. In view of this it was neither possible to date the structure nor relate it to neighbouring duns.



a Entrance, from exterior of dun



b North side of entrance passage from interior of dun