

= Hillforts in Scotland =

Hillforts in Scotland are earthworks , sometimes with wooden or stone enclosures , built on higher ground , which usually include a significant settlement , built within the modern boundaries of Scotland . They were first studied in the eighteenth century and the first serious field research was undertaken in the nineteenth century . In the twentieth century there were large numbers of archaeological investigations of specific sites , with an emphasis on establishing a chronology of the forts . Forts have been classified by type and their military and ritual functions have been debated .

They were introduced into Scotland during the Bronze Age from around 1000 BCE . The largest group are from the Iron Age , with over 1 @, @ 000 hillforts , mostly below the Clyde @-@ Forth line , most of which were abandoned during the period of Roman occupation of Britain . There are also large numbers of vitrified forts , which have been subjected to fire , many of which may date to this period . After Roman occupation in the early Middle Ages some hillforts were reoccupied and petty kingdoms were often ruled from smaller nucleated forts using defensible natural features , as at Edinburgh and Dunbarton .

= = Early studies = =

The first major study of Scottish hillforts was undertaken by General William Roy and published as *The Military Antiquities of the Romans in Britain* in 1793 . However , Roy only recorded native forts like Burnswark that had a close relationship to Roman constructions (in this case probably Roman practice siege camps) , or which he wrongly attributed to be Roman in origin . George Chalmers ' (1742 ? 1825) first volume of *Caledonia* (1807) contained an arbitrary list of forts , but recognised that defences at Burnswark were not just in anticipation of Roman invasion , but to defend against native threats . He also recognised some of the relationships between major and subordinate sites , and the importance of intervisibility between sites . In 1851 the Scots @-@ Canadian Daniel Wilson was the first person to use the term " pre @-@ historic " in English , but he was dismissive of the significance of hillforts . The first serious field research in Scotland was undertaken by David Christison , in the decade preceding his Rhind lectures of 1894 . This was the first comprehensive survey of hillforts in a region of Britain . It was critical of previous neglect of the subject and cautious in labelling all forts as prehistoric . His work was published in 1898 as *Early Fortification of Scotland* and became the model for subsequent national and regional studies .

In the twentieth century there were large numbers of archaeological investigations of specific sites , which formed the basis for an attempt to establish a chronology of the forts that would allow them to be fitted into a " defensive sequence " of invasion and occupation . Particularly important in Northern Britain was C. M. Piggott 's investigation at Hownam Rings in the Cheviots (1948) . This established the " Hownam model " for Iron Age forts of progressive complexity of enclosure . These began with simple palisades , developed into stone univallate defences (with a single rampart) , then more complex multivallate walls (with multiple ramparts) and then finally the abandonment of these defences for stone @-@ built roundhouses attributed to the Pax Romana in the first or second century BCE . This was challenged by Peter Hill on the basis of his excavations at Broxmouth near Edinburgh , from which he was able to suggest that the chronology of hill fort development was more complex and that stone @-@ build houses pre @-@ dated the arrival of the Romans . The introduction of reliable carbon dating in the late twentieth century allowed new approaches to be developed in which the defensive sequence was less prominent . The idea of developing enclosure , followed by a period of post @-@ enclosure settlement developed in the Hownam model is still seen as having some validity .

= = Classification and function = =

A. H. A. Hogg identified four types of hillfort : contour forts , promontory forts , cliff forts and ridge forts . Contour forts , where banks and ditches are moulded to the shape of the hill , are the dominant form in Scotland . Less significant are promontory forts , usually employing coastal

features , such as the largest one in Scotland at the Mull of Galloway . Different types of defensive style occurred throughout the Iron Age period , some of which may have been a response to Roman siege warfare . There were different combinations in the use of earth , stone or timber . Timber was frequently in @-@ filled with stone or other materials . In continental Europe the timber is often arranged vertically , but in Scotland horizontal timbers were more common . The function of hillforts has been much debated . It was traditionally assumed that they were primarily defensive in nature , but in the late twentieth century this view began to be questioned and social , ritual and religious functions were emphasised .

= = Bronze Age = =

Bronze working developed in Scotland from about 2000 BCE . As elsewhere in Europe , it was in this period that hillforts of varying size and form were first introduced . Some had timber palisades and others ditches and ramparts . These included the occupation of Eildon hill near Melrose in the Scottish Borders , from around 1000 BCE , which accommodated hundreds of houses on a fortified hilltop . Traprain Law in East Lothian , had a 20 @-@ acre enclosure , sectioned in two places west of the summit , made up of a coursed , stone wall with a rubble core . The occupation of Castle Rock at Edinburgh and Burnswark in Dumfries and Galloway , also date from this time . Additionally , there were much smaller forts that were domestic in scale and which would have housed only one or two families . The function of these forts have been debated , with some stressing their military role and others their importance as symbolic centres of local society .

= = Iron Age = =

From about 700 BCE iron working reached north Britain . There is evidence for about 1 @, @ 000 Iron Age hillforts in Scotland , most located below the Clyde @-@ Forth line . The majority are circular , with a single palisade around an enclosure . They appear to have been largely abandoned in the Roman period , both in the occupied region and further north in the regions beyond Roman control . This may have been because of the threat posed by Roman incursions , which meant that concentrations of military and political force were vulnerable to incursions and siege . Archaeological evidence indicates that some were reoccupied after their departure .

There are also numerous vitrified forts , the walls of which have been subjected to fire , which may date to this period , but an accurate chronology has proven to be evasive . When first noted in the nineteenth century it was assumed that vitrification had been deliberately undertaken as part of the building process to harden walls , but this hypothesis was rejected by V. Gordon Childe in the 1940s and subsequent excavations have indicated that , since the debris from such walls fell on the deposits of occupation it could not been part of the building process . Reconstructions have indicated the difficulty of deliberately firing timbers in this way , particularly in the prevailing climatic conditions in Scotland , and it is more likely that this was done as part of a process of fort destruction , either after conquest or when abandoned by the inhabitants . Extensive studies of such a fort at Finavon Hill near Forfar in Angus , suggest dates for the destruction of the site in either the last two centuries BCE , or the mid @-@ first millennium CE . Excavations at Dunnideer , Aberdeenshire indicate a date for its destruction in the period 500 ? 250 BCE .

= = Early Medieval = =

For the period after the departure of the Romans in the fifth century there is evidence of a series of new forts . According to archaeologist Leslie Alcock , warfare was perhaps the " principal social activity in Early Historic northern Britain " , playing a major part in " contemporary prose and poetry " , and for this reason hill forts of this period have been commonly thought of as defensive structures designed to repel attack . Some became the centres of competing kingdoms . These were often smaller " nucleated " constructions compared with those from the Iron Age , sometimes utilising major geographical features , as at Edinburgh , which was probably the main fortification of the

Brythonic kingdom of the Gododdin , and Dunbarton rock , who gave its Brythonic name of Alt Clut to the kingdom that dominated the Strathclyde region in the post @-@ Roman period . The northern British peoples utilised different forms of fort and the determining factors in construction were local terrain , building materials , and politico @-@ military needs . The first identifiable king of the Picts , Bridei mac Maelchon (r. c . 550 @-@ 84) had his base at the fort of Craig Phadrig near modern Inverness . The Gaelic overkingdom of Dál Riata was probably ruled from the fortress of Dunadd , now near Kilmartin in Argyll and Bute .