

HURLY HAWKIN, ANGUS

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The site lies about 5 km west of Dundee on the Braes of Carse looking south over the Tay estuary (NO 332328). Two small streams have carved steep-sided gullies which provided natural protection for a small tongue of land lying between them. The two streams join just south of the site, creating a little promontory at a height of 80 m above sea level. Now masked by trees, the spot provided a wide outlook which included the estuary of the Tay and the Carse of Gowrie to within a few miles of Perth.

Surface indications suggested a possible broch with a ditch to the north where the approach was easy. Excavation confirmed the broch but showed that it had been quarried away almost to foundation level although enough remained to indicate the over-all dimensions - an inner courtyard 12 m in diameter with a surrounding wall 5 - 6 m thick. The interior had been partially excavated by Andrew Jervise of Brechin in the 1860s and, earlier still, had been 'turned over' by the then Lord Gray. Jervise's plan¹ shows the entrance in the north. In fact, the entrance was found in the SW quadrant; Jervise's entrance gave access to a wall-chamber or stairway only a fragment of which remained. A second wall chamber is suggested by fragmentary remains in the SE quadrant of the broch wall.

A trench across the position of the possible ditch revealed a souterrain of the Angus type² with walls remaining to a height of 1.5 m. This was 1.8 m wide and about 25 m long with a paved floor encumbered with fallen roof slabs. Eventually it was possible to lift the paving when about 0.75 m of carefully laid packing was uncovered and, beneath that, the bottom of the V-shaped ditch. Further examination to the north of the line of the souterrain revealed a rampart and a second ditch but a further extension of the excavation showed no trace of a third ditch. The entrance to the souterrain had been deliberately blocked but had apparently opened onto a courtyard below present ground level. The paving of this courtyard was incomplete and its full extent could not be determined but, in order to construct it, the rampart to the north had been cut away and the ditches filled up with rubble. Just west of this courtyard, the two ditches had apparently been run together and had then descended into the gully on that side.

In the course of the excavation of the broch interior an area of paving was discovered behind the inner face of the broch wall on the western side.

Further investigation between the inner and outer faces of the broch wall revealed a series of post-holes set into a low bank of clay about 0.5 m high. These were some 22 cm in diameter, up to 30 cm deep and 45 - 60 cm apart, set in an arc. The paving followed closely the line of the clay bank. Ultimately, twenty-seven of these post-holes were uncovered, curving gently towards the inner face of the broch. One or two were found under the large foundation slabs of the inner face but, as the broch floor was some 25 cm below the base of the wall foundation, they disappeared beyond this point. These post-holes indicate the existence of a structure of upright posts which, if circular, had a diameter of about 15 m.

The excavation thus produced four phases of occupation and the sequence is plain enough purely from structural evidence. The site had originally been defended by double ditches and ramparts - a small promontory fort for want of a better label. The inner rampart had been levelled by the broch builders, the broch wall in the north overlying the levelled rampart. The disturbed clay beneath the broch wall and the difference in height between the inner and outer foundations of the wall faces at this point clearly indicate the sequence. Following the construction of the broch wall, the floor of the inner area was levelled off; in the SE quadrant the paving was laid on 0.7 m of packing above the undisturbed clay of the original surface. In this surface a number of post-holes were found, belonging possibly to the earlier promontory fort. The broch was followed by the souterrain whose builders used the material from the broch to fill the bottom of the inner ditch of the promontory fort and to construct the walls. This would account, partly at least, for the quarrying of the broch walls. The souterrain entrance was subsequently blocked and the courtyard to the NW enlarged. Finally the souterrain was destroyed by throwing down the roof slabs into the passage where they lay on about 45 cm of accumulated silt. The passage was then filled in.

This leaves the timber structure unaccounted for. It was obviously pre-broch. The low bank into which the post-holes had been set still remained as did an area of paving closely following the line of the bank. On this paving the inner face of the broch had been built. The post-holes found below the broch floor in the SE quadrant could not be associated with this timber structure. From the evidence it seems likely that this was either part of the layout of the interior of the promontory fort, which seems unnecessary, or, and perhaps more likely, had been built within the defences at a later date, but before the building of the broch. Unfortunately, although both broch and souterrain produced a quantity of small finds which suggest reasonably accurate dating, the only find which can be associated with the earlier struc-

tures was a small rectangular plate of bone, 12 cm long and 2 cm wide, pierced by three small holes in line horizontally.

The broch finds place it fairly precisely at the end of the first or the beginning of the second centuries AD. Native pottery was notably absent but some samian and a quantity of metal-work indicate such a date. The souterrain produced pottery similar to the finer native ware of Ardestie and Carlungie and it may be significant that on a small area of paving, 30 cm below ground level to the north of the entrance but outside the limits of the entrance courtyard, two fragments of pottery were found which were part of the same pot found on the paving of the entrance passage. From this it seems possible that the souterrain in its original state was associated with surface dwellings which were demolished in the later re-use of the site. This close comparison with Ardestie would suggest a similar date, possibly late second or early third century AD. The souterrain produced no carbon which could be used for dating purposes while, in the case of the broch, the carbon obtained was heavily contaminated with fibrous roots from the trees which covered the site.

One point may be made here. Souterrains south of the Grampians are generally dated fairly late in the Iron Age and there is little doubt that Hurly Hawkin is no exception. But in Sutherland, as Dr Fairhurst has suggested elsewhere in this volume, they are earlier by some four centuries. Recently, Dr Anne Robertson found pottery similar to the native Ardestie ware under the rampart of the first century Roman fort at Cardean³; nearby is the recorded site of a souterrain. The possibility of a pre-Roman date for at least some of the souterrains in the south ought to be borne in mind.

The promontory fort and the timber enclosure at Hurly Hawkin must precede the end of the first century AD, possibly by several centuries. In the light of the evidence little more can be said. What is interesting, however, is the apparently early date for the promontory fort. In Scotland, these tend to be regarded as coming relatively late in the Iron Age, and many of them undoubtedly are, but there is no real reason why this simplest of all defensive systems should not be early, as is the case south of the Border. The circumstances of the times and the needs of the builders must undoubtedly have been an important factor in deciding what type of fortification to build. Some of these forts could have been built early.

The timber enclosure presents more in the way of problems. The bank into which the posts had been inserted slopes away towards the south, suggesting that this was no more than the result of the levelling off of the floor within

the timber walling. The material from the rampart had been scattered over the post-holes in the north by the broch builders. This fact, with the survival of the bank and the paving associated with it, suggests that the timber enclosure was the last part to be occupied before the broch was built, since these features would be unlikely to survive if the enclosure had preceded the fort. It seems to represent the wall of a pretty massive enclosure, possibly a hut, with a diameter of 15 m or so. It could be contemporary with the ditches and ramparts or have succeeded them. As already indicated, finds from the fort and enclosure were very few and no precise date is possible. But if comparison with similar sites in the south are valid in this case, then a date in the early Iron Age seems reasonable.

Notes

It is hoped that a full report of this excavation will appear in a forthcoming volume of the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

1. Jervise, A. 'Account of Excavations at Hurly Hawkin', PSAS VI (1864-6), 210-14.
2. Wainwright, F.T. The Souterrains of Southern Pictland (1963).
3. I am grateful to Dr Anne Robertson, Hunterian Museum, Glasgow, for this information.