

INDEX → PLACES → BURNSWARK

## BURNSWARK

Roman Fortlet & Practice Works

Burnswark, Dumfries & Galloway

NGRef: NY187791

OSMap: LR85

Type: Fortlet, Practice Work, Industry

Roads

Military Road: WNW (6) to Ladyward (Dumfries & Galloway)

Military Road: SE (3) to Blatobvgivm (Dumfries & Galloway)

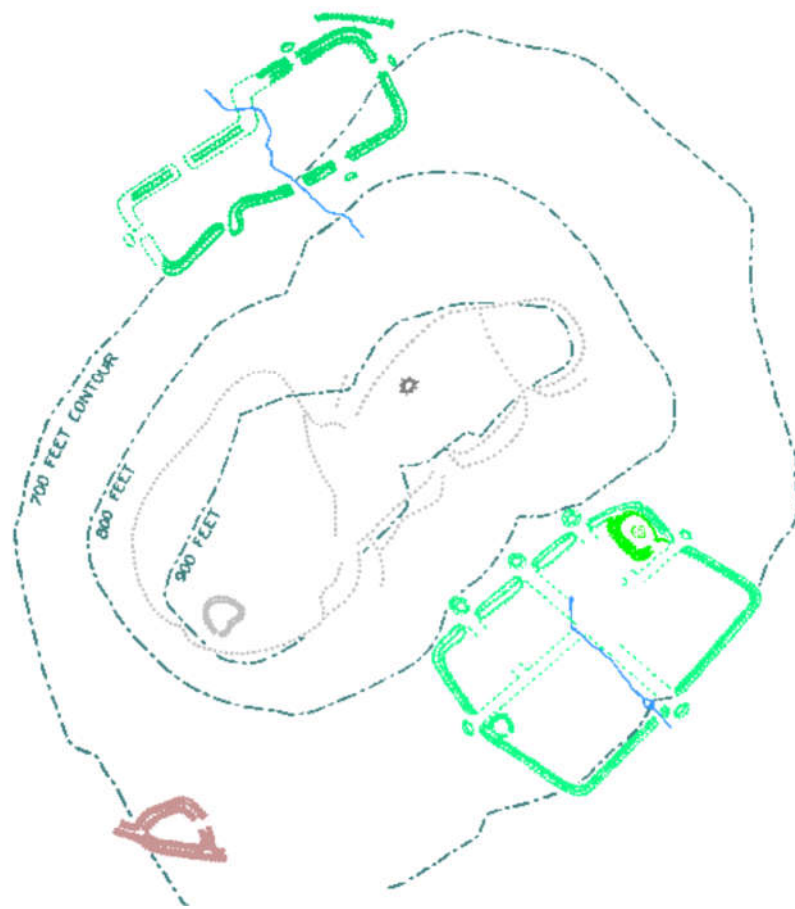
### The Burnswark Site



**The Burnswark Hillfort**  
from the approach-road to the south

The native hill fort dominates the area for miles around, and was possibly the site of a siege during the early conquest of Scotland, with large marching camps built on both the north and south sides, that on the south later turned into a training camp where Roman soldiers would be sent to learn artillery skills. Three ballista platforms dominate the northern ramparts of the south camp, whose western defences partly overlie a known Antonine fortlet, now hidden within a plantation of trees. The ballista A prominent outcrop on the south side of the British camp was evidently used as a target during Roman times as several examples of leaden sling-shot have been recovered from this area during excavation.

### The Burnswark Training Camp & Practice Works



**Plan of the Burnswark Site**  
Oriented with north at the top



**The Northern Training Camp**  
viewed from the hillfort



**The Southern Training Camp**  
viewed from the hillfort

The possibility that Burnswark was primarily a training camp is supported by the fact that there are two practice works nearby, situated to either side of the Burnswark hillfort. These training earthworks were very likely erected under the supervision of Roman engineers in order to teach troops the basics of entrenchment. The rampart of the southern training camp partly overlies the defensive ditch of the Antonine fortlet which occupied its north-eastern corner, and silting evidence suggests that the earlier earthwork had been abandoned for some considerable time. All of the pottery recovered from the site dates to the second century. Traces of permanent structures within the southern encampment suggest that the site continued in use until the early-third century.

### Masses of Lead Slingshot Found

Prior to the 1985 excavations at Burnswark only 28 Roman lead slingshots had been recovered from the forts of Northern Britain; at [Ambleside](#), [Birdoswald](#), [Birrens](#), [Chesterholm](#), [Corbridge](#) and [Housesteads](#). In 1985 there were a grand total of 133 lead slingshot recovered from the environs of the Burnswark complex alone. The majority of these lead shot were found clustered around three areas of the hillfort's southern rampart and it seems likely that the Romans had erected targets at these points. It has been suggested that the profusion of ammunition finds, which also included arrow-heads and *ballista*-bolts,

very-likely indicates that Burnswark was a training camp where units were sent, piecemeal, in order to be instructed in the use of these projectile weapons. During our visit a leisurely scan of the debris at the entrances to several rabbit-burrows in the hillfort's southern rampart turned-up a diamond-shaped stone with evident impact-damage on one of its surfaces (see on right), it is possible that this was used by the Romans as a sling-stone.



## The Antonine Fortlet

N.G.Ref	Dimensions	Area
NY010662	100 x 70 ft (c.30.5 x 21.3m)	<¼ acre (<0.06 ha)

A small fortlet was built during the Antonine period just south of the Burnswark Iron-Age hillfort, which had been abandoned for many years prior to the Roman occupation of the area. Only one barrack-block was found during excavations within the fortlet so the garrison numbered no more than a single century of 80 men. The fortlet was rectangular and measured 100 x 70 feet (c.30.5 x 21.3m) covering an area of less than ¼ acre (i.e. only 7,000ft<sup>2</sup> or 649m<sup>2</sup>).

**A Probable Roman Slingstone from Burnswark** found in a rabbit-warren on the southern hillside (note the damage caused by a high-velocity impact)



**The Ballista Platforms**  
in the south camp's north defences

## Bibliography and Links

See: *Britannia* v (1974) p.152 table.V.

Link to maps of the area from: [StreetMap](#) [Old-Maps](#) [MultiMap](#)



This page was last modified: 27/1/2016