



HISTORIC  
ENVIRONMENT  
SCOTLAND

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ALBA

Property in Care (PIC) ID:	PIC131
Designations:	Scheduled Monument (SM90064)
Taken into State care:	1933 (Guardianship)
Last Reviewed:	2021

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# CASTLELAW HILL FORT



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# HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### CASTLELAW HILL FORT

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Please note, the research for this document was undertaken during 2020-2021 with limited access to archives and resources, as a result of Covid-19. While every attempt was made for accuracy throughout the statement, errors or omissions may remain. Please direct comments or suggestions to [CRTenquiries@hes.scot](mailto:CRTenquiries@hes.scot)

# 1. SUMMARY

## 1.1 Introduction

Castlelaw Hill Fort<sup>1</sup> is an Iron Age hillfort, probably built in at least two phases in the mid- to late-first-millennium BC. The fort is prominently situated on a spur at the foot of a higher hill named Castle Knowe. It is one of a number of forts and enclosures along the flank of the Pentland Hills south-west of Edinburgh and commands far-reaching views to the south and east.

The fort consists of three ramparts and two ditches which enclose an oval space, accessed via three entranceways. A souterrain,<sup>2</sup> dating to the 1st–2nd centuries AD but incorporating an earlier cup-marked stone, is set into the innermost ditch. The souterrain was capped in concrete in the 1930s and so is accessible internally. Traces of later cultivation run across the site, visible as ridges and terraces.

Castlelaw was designated as a Scheduled Monument in 1924<sup>3</sup> and taken into State care in three stages, commencing with a Guardianship Agreement in 1933.<sup>4</sup>

The site is accessible to view all year round, and is reached by a short, steep path from a sizeable parking area. Access is via a pedestrian gate into a fenced enclosure.<sup>5</sup> The souterrain is now enclosed by a skylit, concrete roof, covered in turf; its interior is generally accessible via a metal gate.<sup>6</sup> There is no HES staff presence on the site, which is free to access.

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<sup>1</sup> Defined as such under the 2014 Scheme of Delegation for Properties in Care. Henceforth referred to as 'Castlelaw'. The site is also known as 'Castle Law, Glencorse'. See Canmore entry: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/51871/castle-law-glencorse> (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Souterrains are sometimes also known by the earlier term 'earth house'. Souterrain is defined in Canmore thesaurus as: 'A subterranean or partly subterranean chamber or passage. Often associated with an above ground structure.' See entry at: <https://canmore.org.uk/thesaurus/1/532/SOUTERRAIN> (Accessed: 30 March 2022). For more information on Souterrains, see Appendix 2.

<sup>3</sup> SM90064, scheduling details accessible at: <https://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM90064> (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

<sup>4</sup> In 1933 the souterrain alone was taken into State care. The Woodhouselee Estate was subsequently bought by the War Department, who transferred a larger area (encompassing most of the hill fort) to the Office of Works in 1937 under interdepartmental transfer terms. Lengthy negotiations then followed, with the Guardianship area eventually further extended and informally transferred in January 1960. Details contained within files DD27/1007 and MW1/319, National Records Scotland. For further detail, see Figure 16 and Appendix 1: Timeline.

<sup>5</sup> Please check access information prior to visiting: <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/castlelaw-hill-fort/> (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

<sup>6</sup> Note, access may not be suitable for those with claustrophobia. Prior to visiting, please check current access information, at: <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/castlelaw-hill-fort/prices-and-opening-times/> (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

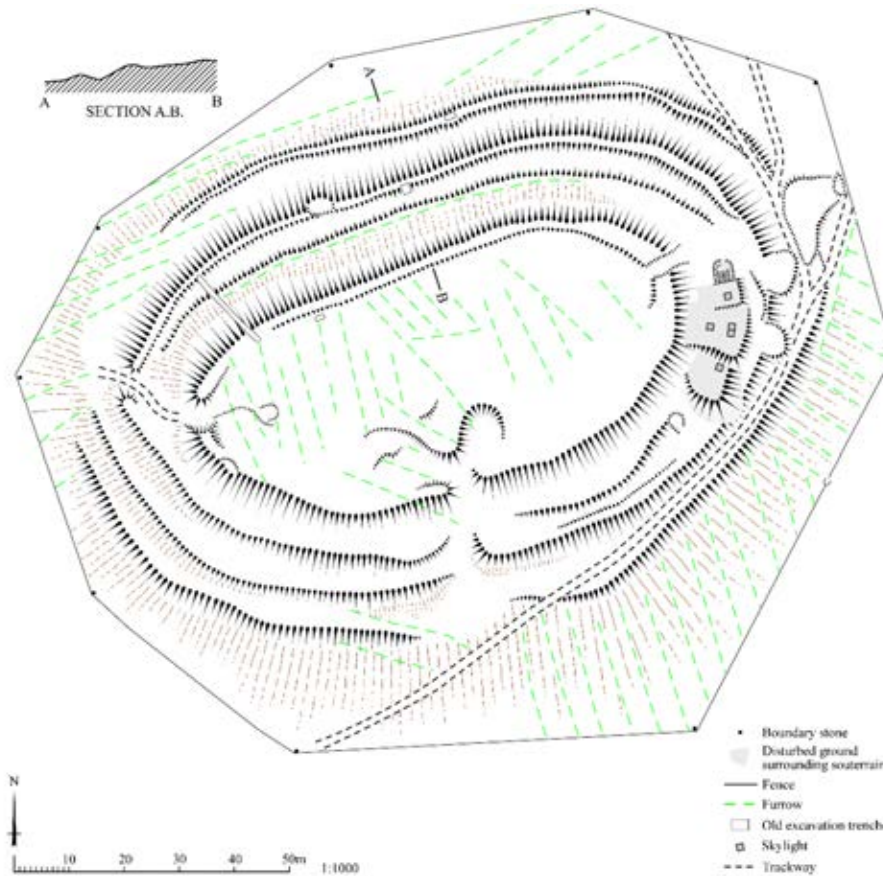


Figure 1: Castlelaw Fort, 1:1000 scale plan, RCAHMS. N.B.: Image depicts site as currently visible in plan, hence souterrain (on east / right of image) is depicted as series of square skylights in disturbed ground. When viewed on the ground, this modern roof addition creates an irregular and bulky profile, pierced by skylights and air vents. © Crown Copyright: HES.



Figure 2: Oblique aerial view, looking south-west. Note sheep grazing close to souterrain entrance, on left of image © Crown Copyright: HES.

## 1.2 Statement of Significance

Castlelaw is of national importance as a well-preserved and easily accessible Iron Age fort in a prominent and attractive location. It has been explored by several phases of small-scale excavation and consolidation in the first half of the 20th century. These investigations revealed considerable complexity but did not fully determine the sequence of the site's construction and use. The previously undetected souterrain was found during excavation and was later consolidated and capped to enable public access.

Castlelaw lies on the edge of an area in active use for military training: while the fort has been preserved and remains accessible, this presence has a significant impact on the site's setting and ambience.

The significance of Castlelaw lies in the quality of the visible remains and their landscape setting, the evidence already retrieved by excavation, and the potential for further investigation. That potential includes the possibility of further characterising and disentangling what is clearly an extended sequence of construction, occupation and use. As well as an Iron Age sequence which is likely to stretch from at least as early as the middle of the first millennium BC to the 2nd century AD or later (overlapping with the Roman presence in southern Scotland), the site also carries traces of later agricultural use. Its preservation, investigation and public presentation are also of significant interest.

Further investigation could support advances in understanding, both of the site's history and also about Iron Age society more generally.

Key aspects of Castlelaw's significance include the following:

- It is an excellent example of an Iron Age enclosed settlement, normally referred to as a 'fort' but whose functions probably extended beyond the defensive.
- Its enclosing banks and ditches suggest an extended sequence of Iron Age occupation and modification, with the souterrain representing a late phase of use.
- Limited-scale excavations have produced important structural and artefactual evidence and have demonstrated the site's archaeological potential.
- It contains buried deposits and structural evidence relating to all phases of its occupation and development.
- The cup-marked stone (possibly Neolithic or Bronze Age in date) built into the souterrain wall, may hint at possible pre-Iron Age activity on site or nearby, or else at the conscious curation of a relic of more ancient times – such finds are not

infrequent on Iron Age sites (e.g. at **Carn Liath**<sup>7</sup> broch in Sutherland), with other known examples incorporated into the construction of souterrains and associated structures (e.g. at **Culsh** in Aberdeenshire, or **Ardestie** and **Tealing** in Angus).

- Its location within a local cluster of similarly located sites, probably of various Iron Age dates, offers the potential to compare and contrast and to explore the relationship between these sites and their Iron Age landscape setting.
- Its surface has been shown to hold evidence for several phases of cultivation, probably dating long after the Iron Age, but at present undated.
- The recent use of the surrounding area for military training purposes is also of interest, and the history of the site's preservation demonstrates an early awareness of coordinated government action to preserve heritage assets.
- It is a relatively accessible site in a pleasant setting, easy to visit and appreciate as a fine field monument in its own right, and as a feature of interest on more extended rural excursions.
- Its importance as an example of early twentieth century conservation and association with several important figures in archaeology of the time, including V. Gordon Childe, Peggy and Stuart Piggott, Margaret Simpson and Margaret Crichton Mitchell.

The following pages give a fuller background to the site and go on to discuss the various aspects of its significance.

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<sup>7</sup> Throughout the text, site names in **bold** are managed by Historic Environment Scotland and are publicly accessible. Access information can be found at: [www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/](http://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/) (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

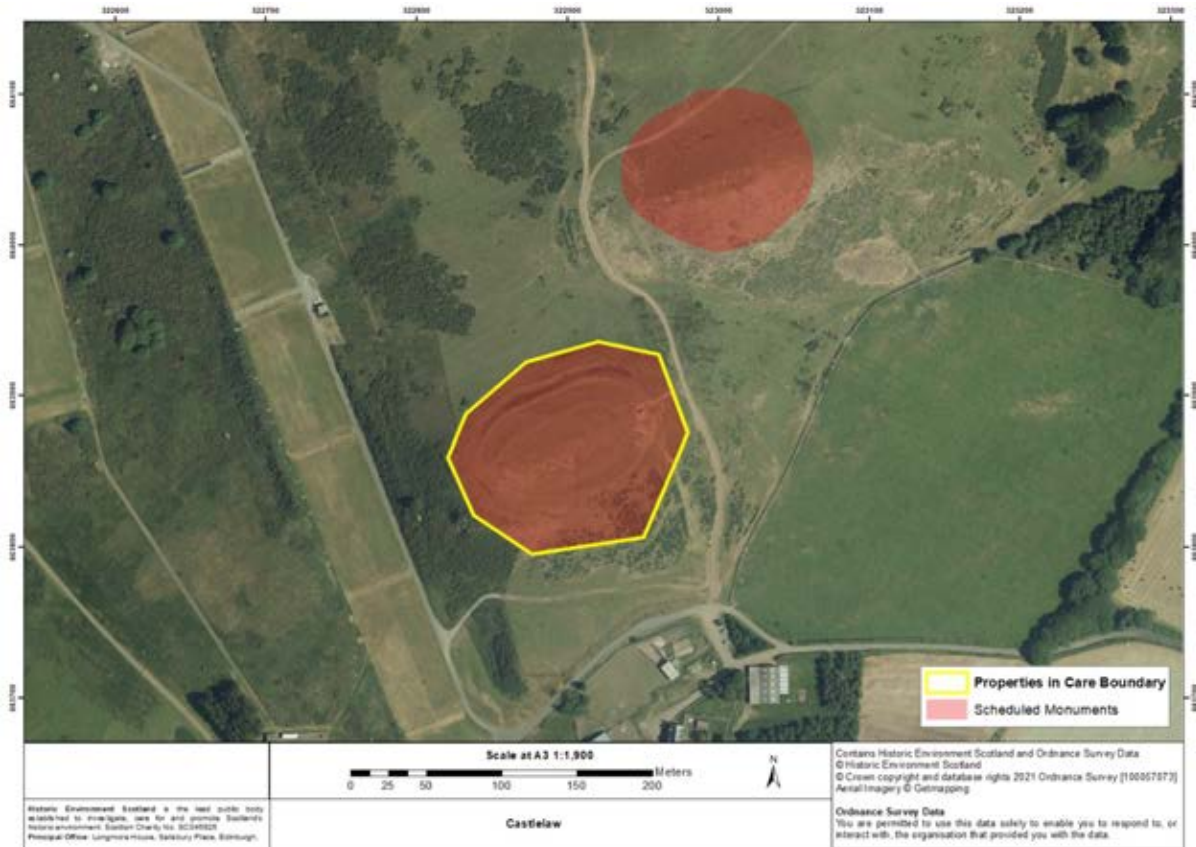


Figure 3: Castlelaw Scheduled area and Property in Care (PIC) boundary, with Castle Knowe Palisaded Enclosure (SM6447) to the NNE. Image for illustrative purposes only.

## 2. ASSESSMENT OF VALUES

### 2.1 Background

#### 2.1.1 Descriptive Overview

The site is referred to interchangeably as ‘Castlelaw’ and Castle Law’. The adjacent farm uses the Castlelaw spelling. (*Law* is a Scots word for a hill; usually a broad hill with gentle contours.) It sits on a slight rise near the foot of a spur projecting from Castle Law Hill. The remains are grass-covered with some gorse.

The relatively flat enclosed space is oval on plan, measuring about 82m ENE to WSW by 35m (0.25 hectares) within a single rampart. Outside this, and not entirely concentric with it, a double rampart and medial ditch enclose an area of about 105m by 55m (0.5 hectares). The outermost rampart is almost absent on the south side, where it is represented by little more than a terrace. (It seems likely that there was originally a rampart here, which has since been removed by agricultural activity, rather than that the outer circuit having been originally incomplete.)

There are three entrances through the ramparts, all of which appear to be of Iron Age date. They lie toward each end and WSW, SSE and ENE. The ENE gateway has been explored by



excavation, and a number of sections have been cut through the ramparts (see below for details). All three entranceways traverse the defences obliquely.



*Figure 4: Souterrain during excavation (looking north) in 1932, with modern, wooden shoring. © Crown Copyright: HES.*

Just south of the ENE entrance and set into a quarry ditch<sup>8</sup> which lies between the innermost and the second rampart, is the souterrain which is described below.

While not yet proven, the most likely sequence for the fort's construction appears to begin with a wooden palisaded enclosure on the same line as the innermost rampart. This seems to have then been converted into a rampart, outside which were added the outer double rampart and medial ditch, with a quarry ditch in places between the inner and second ramparts. The souterrain is clearly later, dug into the quarry ditch, which Childe noted had been deepened and widened for this purpose. Finally, and possibly many centuries later, the interior and parts of the ramparts were cultivated, with cross-cutting ridges suggesting at least three episodes of this activity, which incorporated and reduced the southern outer rampart, co-opting the ditch on this side as a cultivation terrace.

The site is surrounded by a metal post and wire fence. Access is by a metal bow-yett (kissing gate) at the point nearest to the parking area. There are also deliberate gaps in the fence, to allow sheep to come and go freely. There are currently (2021) two interpretation panels on the site, one focussing on the fort and the second on the souterrain. Updated panels are proposed for installation in 2022.

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<sup>8</sup> That is a ditch which was likely created from quarrying activity, rather than being specifically created as a defensive feature.

Features revealed by excavation but not currently visible on site:

The structure of the ramparts was tested by cross-sections cut by excavations in 1931-2 and 1948. The innermost rampart, at least near the ENE gateway, appears to have been constructed of clay and/or layers of clay-rich turf, with its back face formed by an upright wooden palisade (which may itself be a replacement for an earlier free-standing palisade).<sup>9</sup> Transverse slots, perhaps for timber beams, ran through the stone base of the clay rampart: these suggest it may have been a wooden 'box' framework. Near the gateway, the rampart was fronted in stone.

The ENE gateway through the inner rampart was examined during both phases of excavation. It appears to have been set at an angle to the inner rampart and to have consisted of a timber-lined passage, with stout posts set on either side, perhaps to carry a walkway and/or tower above the passage. The remains in this area were rather confused but suggest the wooden elements of the entrance had been modified and replaced on a number of occasions.

The middle and outer rampart, and the intervening ditch, appear to have been built as a unit and later than the inner rampart. The middle rampart contained stone features consistent with it having been a stone-faced, rubble-cored wall, possibly with a palisade rising through it, while the outer rampart appeared to be a simple rubble bank.

The souterrain was discovered during the 1931-2 excavations, and subsequently consolidated and capped in concrete in 1935-6. The main passage of the souterrain is 21m long and appears to have been entered from the north end, with the passage sloping downwards, away from the entrance (N.B. the present gated entrance hatch and steps are a modern addition). A side passage opens partway along, on the west side, and gives access to a sub-circular, corbelled chamber about 4m across. A cup-marked slab is built into the top course of the wall, near to the inner terminus of the main passage.<sup>10</sup> After excavation, the souterrain was capped with a skylit, concrete roof and covered in turf and is generally accessible via a metal gate.<sup>11</sup> While allowing well-lit access to the interior, the roof design and concrete materials have created problems with moisture retention for a structure, which as it is a large subterranean void, would be likely to act as a reservoir for water to pool in. As a result, the walls are often very wet and much of the stonework is affected by green algal growth, exacerbated by the light from the rooflights.<sup>12</sup> The gravel-covered floor is often puddled and muddy, particularly at the entrance to the side cell. Modern graffiti can be seen carved into both the roof and original stonework.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Of Childe's excavations at Castlelaw, Ralston notes "the negative traces of one of the first undoubted wooden palisades on an Iron Age hillfort to be found in Scotland were recognised", Ralston 2009, 57.

<sup>10</sup> N.B. This was not recorded by the excavators.

<sup>11</sup> Note, access may not be suitable for those with claustrophobia. Prior to visiting, please check current access information, at: <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/castlelaw-hill-fort/prices-and-opening-times/> (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

<sup>12</sup> N.B. The condition of the monument is closely monitored.

<sup>13</sup> Visitors are reminded that it is illegal to damage or deface a Scheduled Monument, and unauthorised works or the addition of graffiti to a heritage asset constitutes a heritage crime.

On discovery, the souterrain had no roof, and was filled with earth and broken rock. The process of emptying and consolidating it produced a number of significant finds, including pottery and metalwork of Roman provenance. These are now in the collections of National Museums Scotland.<sup>14 15</sup> Traces of postholes in an arc, close to the souterrain's entrance, have been interpreted as the remains of a circular wooden house.

### 2.1.2 Antiquarian and archaeological activity: surveying and interpreting

The earliest clear depiction of the fort is as a circular symbol on Knox's map of 1816, marked 'Roman Camp'.<sup>16</sup> However, General Roy's earlier map of 1752-5<sup>17</sup> shows an oval 'blank' area under the name 'Castlelaw', surrounded by cultivation ridges, with a track running across the southern edge of the oval: this closely corresponds to the area of Castlelaw fort.<sup>18</sup> What is today Castlelaw Hill is marked as Lawhill on the Roy map. The fort appears on the First Edition Ordnance Survey Map, surveyed in 1852, as 'Fort'.<sup>19</sup>

The first published mention is the briefest of references by the Reverend Alexander Torrence, written around 1833:

There are distinct vestiges of two camps in this parish, one at Castlelaw and the other on a rising piece of ground which forms part of the base of Turnhouse Hill.<sup>20</sup>

The first detailed survey was undertaken by RCAHMS in 1915, and their plan and description<sup>21</sup> was used by Professor V. Gordon Childe<sup>22</sup> as the basis for his excavation report, although with slight changes to the plan (see Figure 6). A new plan was made by the Ministry of Works around 1958.<sup>23</sup> In 2005 the site was re-surveyed in fine detail by RCAHMS, as part of a survey of the whole military training area. A combination of traditional and digital techniques was used to produce a digital terrain model, which allows the micro-topography of the site to be displayed in various ways (see Figure 5). This work was used to support a visit of RCAHMS Commissioners in 2006, for which a handbook was produced.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> PSAS 1939.

<sup>15</sup> The NMS catalogue is accessible at: <https://www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/> (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

<sup>16</sup> Knox 1816.

<sup>17</sup> Roy 1747-55 *Military Survey of Scotland* (Lowlands 1752-5, Strip 7, Section 5e). Accessible online via National Library of Scotland, at: <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/roy/#zoom=14&lat=55.8642&lon=-3.2371&layers=1&point=0,0> (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

<sup>18</sup> Traces of the track shown on Roy survive above Easter Howgate; under part of the road which gives access to Castlelaw Farm and the firing ranges; and also on the lower west slope of the hill, downhill from the ranges.

<sup>19</sup> First Edition OS Map view accessible online via National Library of Scotland, at: <https://maps.nls.uk/view/74426712> (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

<sup>20</sup> NSA 1834, vol i, p 310 (The publication date is sometimes cited as 1845, but this is for the final volume in the NSA series, which appeared in instalments from 1834 to 1845).

<sup>21</sup> RCAHMS 1929.

<sup>22</sup> Childe 1933a+b.

<sup>23</sup> Office of Works unpublished survey (held by HES).

<sup>24</sup> RCAHMS 2006.

This survey demonstrated the existence of areas of parallel ridges, representing at least three separate phases of cultivation.

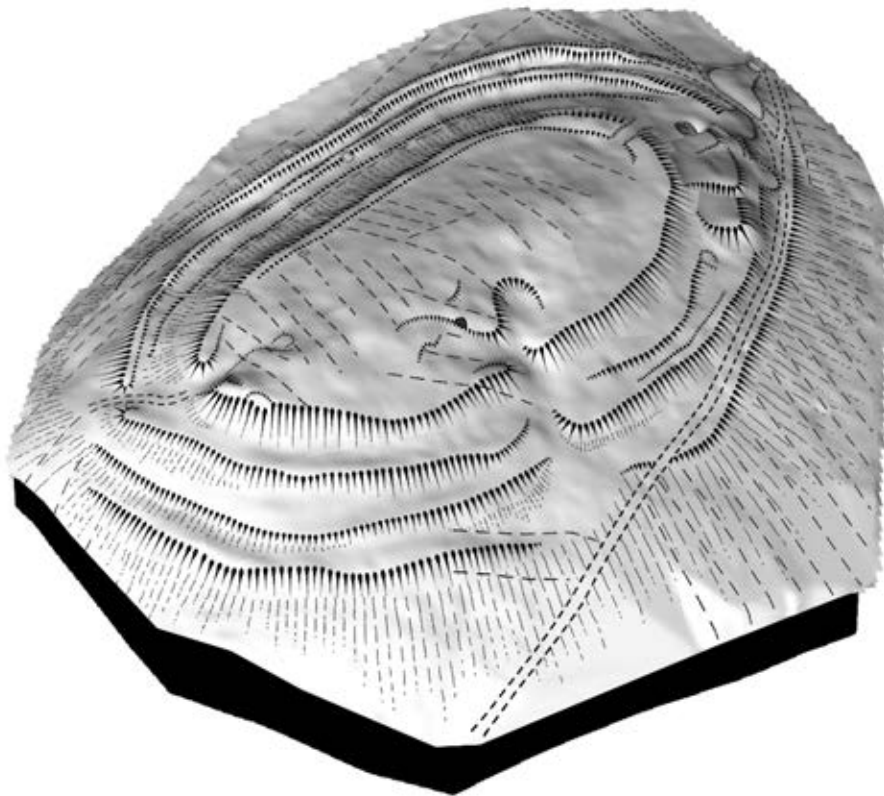


Figure 5: RCAHMS 2005 digital survey “terrain model” showing phases of cultivation. © Crown Copyright: HES.

Castlelaw is mentioned in several discussions of the Iron Age in southern Scotland written in the latter part of the 20th century and is generally regarded as a typical example of a small fort, with the assumed sequence of first palisade then single rampart then multiple ramparts. While less physically impressive than many other lowland hillforts, its proximity to Edinburgh, combined with its ease of access, have resulted in it being much visited by archaeologists based in that city.<sup>25</sup>

### 2.1.3 Excavations

Castlelaw has been the subject of two principal excavation campaigns, with further clearance in the interim years, associated with the preparation of the souterrain for public presentation. Though relatively limited in the extent of the areas they examined, the investigations produced very significant results.

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<sup>25</sup> Castlelaw has been excavated and/or surveyed and/or discussed in print by all four successive holders of the Abercromby Chair of Prehistoric Archaeology at Edinburgh University: Professors Gordon Childe, Stuart Piggott, Dennis Harding and Ian Ralston.

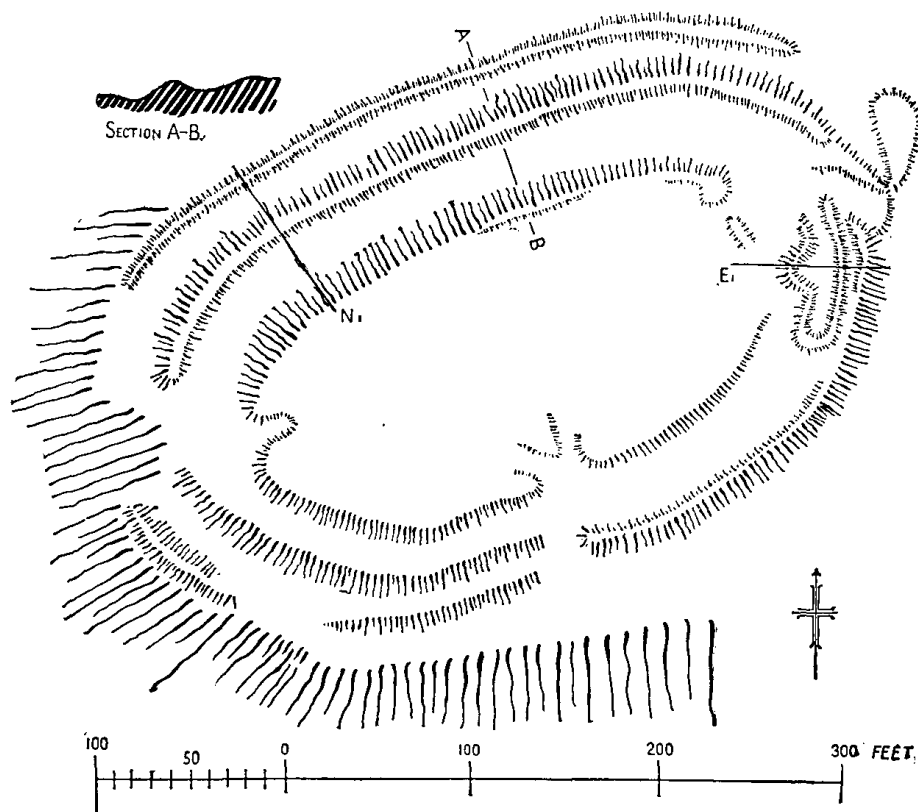


Figure 6: Plan of Castlelaw Fort (based on H.M.O.W. Survey) showing sections excavated during Childe's 1931-32 excavations. Image from Childe 1933a, 363. Reproduced with kind permission of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

In 1931 and 1932, Professor V. Gordon Childe cut two complete, and several partial, cross-sections at right angles to the defences, and also explored the area of the ENE entrance. He also discovered the souterrain tucked inside the second rampart, just south of that entrance. Artefacts from the souterrain showed that it was in use in the second century AD or later.<sup>26</sup> Childe was assisted in his work by members of the recently formed Edinburgh League of Prehistorians,<sup>27</sup> an archaeological society consisting mainly of students and enthusiasts.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Childe 1933a+b.

<sup>27</sup> Ralston 2009, 82-89 provides an account of the League, which was conceived in 1929 and formally came into being in 1930. It was most active from 1929 to 1936 but lasted until 1948. The League's founding Secretary was Margaret E. B. Simpson, who left after being appointed Assistant Inspector with the Office of Works. She is considered to be the first woman to become a professional archaeologist in Scotland and may even have been the first of Childe's students to achieve professional status. Many more were to follow.

Margaret E. Crichton Mitchell (later Margaret Stewart) was Vice-President of the League between 1930-1936 and gave several lectures to the society during this time. She was Childe's only student to complete their PhD while he was at Edinburgh University (Ralston 2009, 48, 86-88).

<sup>28</sup> An excellent series of photographs survives in HES collections, some digitised and accessible online on Canmore: <https://canmore.org.uk/collection/1176628> (Accessed: 30 March 2022). These show

In August 1935, the Office of Works undertook further investigation in the area around the souterrain, in order to level the foundations for the installation of the new concrete roof. The works were supervised by Margaret E.B. Simpson, Assistant Inspector of Ancient Monuments, in consultation with Margaret Crichton Mitchell.<sup>29</sup>

In 1948, Stuart and Peggy Piggott explored an area just south of the ENE entrance, deliberately choosing an area which slightly overlapped with Childe's trenches. Their work provided three sections through the innermost rampart, revealing details of its construction.<sup>30</sup>

The results of these campaigns are discussed below, under Evidential Values.



*Figure 7: Cross-section trench during excavation, with Prof Childe on right-hand side of image (1931/32). © Crown Copyright.*

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Childe with various members of the League, clearly enjoying themselves despite typical spring weather conditions (see Figures 7 and 13).

<sup>29</sup> Letter from V.G. Childe to Margaret Simpson, stating "Miss Crichton Mitchell knows the site better than anyone." dated 07/08/1935 contained in file MW1/318 National Records of Scotland.

<sup>30</sup> Piggott and Piggott 1954.

#### 2.1.4 Conservation and other work

The excavations and particularly the excavation and restoration of the souterrain, are the most major interventions at the site. Since this substantial effort, Castlelaw has been managed in a generally low-key manner. Small concrete blocks were inserted to mark the outer angles of the protected area and replaced when this area was extended. The site was fenced, with the provision of a metal gate to allow pedestrian access and a larger one to allow occasional access for equipment and for livestock. The site is grazed by sheep, which gain access via a narrow gap left for them in the fence. Occasional cutting of gorse has been necessary, both inside and outside the fence, as has rabbit control and earthwork repair around burrows – the two issues being linked, since gorse provides cover for rabbits.<sup>31</sup>

When considering the consolidation and conservation works at Castlelaw, it is worth briefly mentioning the position of the cup-marked stone within the souterrain. The records from the time do not allow us to be certain that this stone is in its original place, or orientation. It is positioned within what is currently the uppermost course of stonework, with the concrete roof apparently placed directly onto it. If it *is* in its original position, we do not know what significance this may have held to those building and using the souterrain.

A particular feature of Castlelaw are the markers erected just outside the fence, warning soldiers training nearby not to damage the site. Older examples take the form of a 6-pointed cut-out metal star on a metal post (these were known as “no-dig” signs to the Army). Newer examples are small rectangular plates with images of a crouching soldier, and a shovel, both with red lines through them, and warning text. Beyond the fort, there are larger notices warning visitors to the area that they are entering a military training area and of the risks inherent.

## 2.2 Evidential values

The evidential value of the upstanding remains visible at Castlelaw is high, for what its constructional details, physical fabric, location and setting can tell us about life during the Iron Age, and particularly about how communities came together to undertake major construction projects. The site’s value in this respect is enhanced by the results of excavation campaigns and by the high potential for the survival of further archaeological deposits and structural evidence relating to the fort’s construction, use and modification over time, including its apparent continuing use after the ramparts and ditches ceased to be maintained.

It is possible on surface evidence alone to suggest a sequence of construction, commencing with the innermost rampart, which survives as a very slight bank. This seems to have been followed, perhaps after some time, by the external addition of a pair of ramparts with a ditch between. The outer of these ramparts is much less substantial than the inner. The

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<sup>31</sup> Details on the Kirkdale Archaeology watching brief maintained in 2008 during the removal of such vegetation, is available at:  
<https://doi.org/10.5284/1051078>.

souterrain, built into the quarry ditch of the middle of the three ramparts, is clearly later than the defences, possibly by an extended period.

Excavations have added a considerable amount of detail, without determining the sequence of the defences.

It seems almost certain that there was a timber palisade set in a stone-packed slot, more or less on the line of the inner rampart. This was later replaced, or supplemented, by a stone-faced rampart with a clay or turf core set on a stone base. (The evidence from the 1948 excavations describes a white clay with darker lines interpreted as brushwood: it may be that this material was stacked turf taken from a clay-rich area, rather than pure clay – whatever the case, it does not seem to have come from the site itself, where the soil and subsoil is red-brown in colour.) The rampart structure was tied together with transverse wooden beams which, presumably, were joined to a timber framework helping to stiffen the stone-built external face of the wall. Slots in the stone base of the rampart appear to be conclusive evidence, and this would place this rampart firmly into the category of ‘timber-laced’ ramparts which has been widely identified in Scotland and on the near Continent.<sup>32</sup>

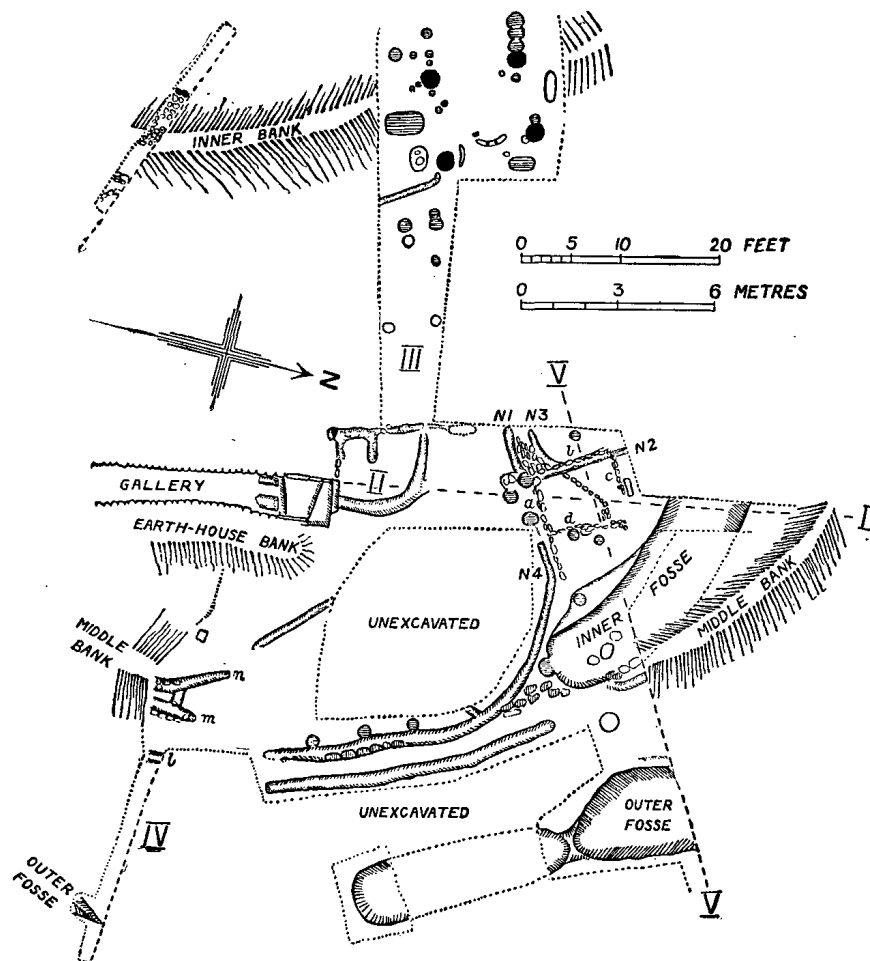


Figure 8: Plan of features at ‘East Gate’ revealed by Childe excavations. (Based on a survey by John Matheson). Image from Childe 1933a, 369. Reproduced with kind permission of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

<sup>32</sup> Harding 2012 offers a recent discussion of classification and Continental comparisons.



The ENE entrance, which the excavator believed to be the principal of the three ways into the site, is characterised by a slight diversion of the rampart at either side of a broad causeway. Excavation revealed a number of postholes, including two pairs of particularly stout posts set either side of the gap (see Figure 8). This was interpreted as evidence for a wooden gatehouse, which interestingly is set slightly askew to the direct line through the rampart – this could offer defensive advantages. There may have been a gated passage with a wooden walkway over it, continuing a continuous walkway around the rampart. The rampart appeared to be faced with timber to either side of this entrance and was also more robustly constructed than was the case in sections cut further away.

The site view on plan suggests that the two outer ramparts, which are closely parallel, may have been built as a unit, along with the ditch between them and the irregular quarry ditch which lies behind the innermost of the pair (here termed the ‘middle’ rampart). The 1931-2 excavations cut only narrow sections, and the description is not entirely clear, but it seems that the middle rampart had an earthen core and that there was a trench to its front, into which a stone facing was set, and possibly a palisade rising within it or forming its rear face. It may be that it, like the innermost rampart, was timber-faced, but this is by no means certain. The outermost rampart, by contrast, appeared in section to be much less elaborate: little more than an upcast mound defining the outer side of the ditch.

The souterrain, found in 1932, had clearly been inserted into the quarry ditch behind the second rampart, at a time when the rampart and ditch had ceased to be maintained. Its date therefore provides a *terminus ante quem* – a date by which ramparts and ditch were redundant. This can with a high degree of confidence be set around 200 AD.

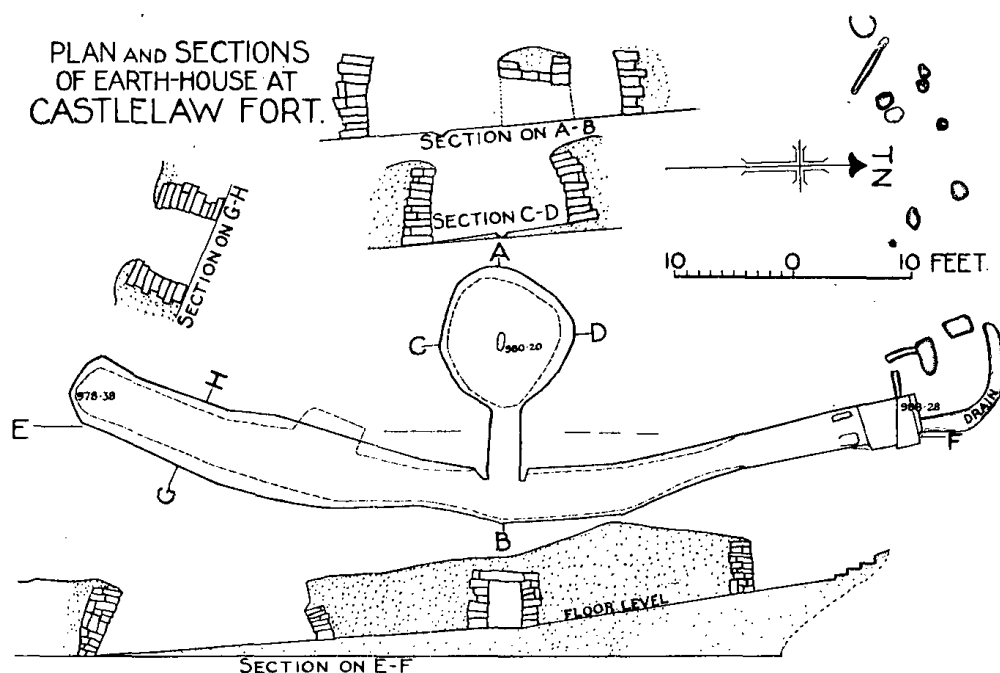


Figure 9: Plan and Sections of souterrain, from Childe’s excavations. (Survey by John Matheson). Image from Childe 1933a, 378. Reproduced with kind permission of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.



*Figure 10: The walls of the souterrain are formed of boulders and quarried stone. Image taken 1975. © Historic Scotland.*

Its walls were formed of coursed, drystone construction which Childe (1933a) noted comprised boulders and quarried stone, which had ‘been brought to the spot from elsewhere’.<sup>33</sup> Those forming the basal course were particularly large stones, with one measuring over 3ft by 1ft. When excavated, its base was found to be of irregular rock lined with a layer of blueish clay. This had apparently been renewed at least once and was described as being in a ‘putty-like’ state on excavation. (It may be that there was originally a sub-floor drain at the southern end of the main passage, which over time had become blocked.) This secondary flooring concealed a set of four rock-cut steps at the entrance to the passage,<sup>34</sup> at the base of which were a pair of sockets, thought to have once contained jambs of wood or stone.

Within the corbelled cell or ‘beehive chamber’, Childe noted that some of the stonework had been dressed, with the interstices between boulders carefully filled with small wedges

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<sup>33</sup> Childe 1933a, 377.

<sup>34</sup> N.B. These are not currently visible. The present steps, providing access to the souterrain, are a modern addition associated with the consolidation of the monument in 1935-36.

of stone. He interpreted a charcoal-filled hollow, near the centre of the cell, to have been the earlier of two hearths.<sup>35</sup>

No roofing was found in situ, although there were many large boulders on the souterrain floor, along with four lintel-sized freestones. The paucity of stone slabs long enough to have spanned the main passage, led Childe to deduce that the souterrain had not been lintelled (in stone) throughout its entire length. However, the scree of broken rock which filled the interior was so similar to that forming the neighbouring banks, that Childe concluded the entire souterrain must have been covered by a continuous bank or mound. Later clearance work supervised by Margaret Simpson in 1935, revealed a setting of stones around the souterrain, which had likely served as a roof-top.<sup>36</sup> It is therefore possible that the structure was once roofed in stone, and that the slabs had been removed for re-use elsewhere. Alternatively, the souterrain may have had a wooden roof, as has more recently been shown for some other examples.<sup>37</sup> The excavation and subsequent consolidation works, while revealing the souterrain and ensuring public access have also had an impact upon its evidential value. The limited reconstruction works, while done to the standards of their time, were not as well recorded as they would be today, and of course proceeded without the kind of recording and analysis techniques available to archaeologists today.

An arc of postholes was found adjacent to the entrance to the souterrain, consistent with a circular wooden house (see Figure 9). See Appendix 2 for further detail on the common association between souterrains and roundhouses.

While excavations on the fort's defences produced no closely datable material (fragments of late prehistoric pottery and lignite or shale armlets and rings are all consistent with a date in the last centuries BC or [less likely] the first centuries AD), a number of artefacts recovered from the souterrain allow a much more precise date. Alongside small fragments of Roman Samian pottery, the most significant items were: i) a bronze brooch with black and red enamel, in a style typical of late 2nd or early 3rd centuries AD 'Roman' metalwork, and ii) a bronze buckle of 'Celtic' style, similar to one from Traprain Law and also dated to the late 2nd century AD. It has been suggested this latter item was manufactured in western Germany, which was then within the Roman Empire.<sup>38</sup>



Figure 11: Illustrations of brooch, buckle and potsherd, found within the souterrain during Childe's excavations. Image from Childe 1933a, 384. Reproduced with kind permission of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

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<sup>35</sup> Childe 1933a.

<sup>36</sup> Memo to Mr Callander, dated 08/11/1933. Contained within file MW1/318, National Records Scotland.

<sup>37</sup> Armit 1999, 581-2.

<sup>38</sup> Childe 1933a+b, also Robertson 1970.

Assuming this material was relatively recently deposited before the souterrain was infilled, that would date the infilling to around 200 AD. This date, and the action of deliberate infilling, correspond with the decommissioning of several souterrains further north, in Perthshire and Angus.<sup>39</sup> It is also broadly consistent with examples further afield in Scotland, including an example excavated immediately beside the one in State care at **Grain**, Kirkwall, Orkney.<sup>40</sup>

Long after the Iron Age, probably in late medieval or post-medieval times, the hillside and the much-reduced remains of the fort were ploughed or dug over on a number of occasions. Detailed survey has suggested at least three episodes of cultivation. This activity may account for the absence of the outer rampart on the south and east sides of the fort.<sup>41</sup> While it has not yet proved possible to date these episodes, one of them may correspond to areas of rig-and-furrow shown, probably schematically, on Roy's map of the mid 1750s, and associated with a set of buildings which may be the predecessor of today's Castlelaw Farm. These appear to avoid the area of the fort itself, although it is not identified as such on the map – interestingly so, as Roy had a keen interest in ancient fortifications.<sup>42</sup> This might suggest that the fort was either under cultivation or covered by scrub at the time of his survey, and thus not obvious.

Finally, it is worth noting that the site's guardianship history has also left physical evidence in addition to the usual fence and interpretation panel, in the form of the concrete roof covering the souterrain and also nine small boundary markers of stone and concrete, probably of more than one date. These markers relate to its entering State care and to the subsequent extension of the protected and managed area, in the 1930s-1970s.<sup>43</sup>

## 2.3 Historical values

### 2.3.1 Early historical background - Roman and Welsh sources

Castlelaw lies within a sizeable geographical area, roughly corresponding to modern Northumberland, Scottish Borders and the Lothians, which Roman literary sources record as having been the territory of a tribe (or group of tribes) known to the Romans as the Votadini (sometimes Otadini). They were a British or Brythonic grouping, speaking a language closely akin to early Welsh.

There is some evidence that the Votadini, if not active allies of Rome, had at least reached a stable accommodation with the occupying forces during their episodic presence in Scotland from the late 1st century AD to the late 4th century. It seems reasonable to assume that the

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<sup>39</sup> Armit 1999, passim.

<sup>40</sup> Haigh and Smith 1984.

<sup>41</sup> RCAHMS 2006.

<sup>42</sup> Roy 1747-55 *Military Survey of Scotland* (Lowlands 1752-5, Strip 7, Section 5e). Accessible online via National Library of Scotland, at: <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/roy/#zoom=14&lat=55.8642&lon=-3.2371&layers=1&point=0,0> (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

<sup>43</sup> RCAHMS 2006.

Votadini were already a well-established and powerful grouping before the Romans appeared.

It has been suggested that the chief settlement of the Votadini was at Traprain Law<sup>44</sup> which is visible in the distance from Castlelaw. An impressive hoard of late Roman silver found at Traprain has been characterised as a gift or bribe in return for continued cooperation with Rome. However, there are other possibilities, including that the hill was a sacred place and the hoard a votive deposit – although there are also more ‘mundane’ Roman artefacts from the site.<sup>45</sup>

The Votadini re-appear under the name Gododdin in the early Welsh epic poem *Y Gododdin*. The poem (best regarded as series of poetical laments rather than a single narrative composition) deals with the prelude to, and the Battle of Catraeth in c. AD 600. Their chief fortress at this date was at Din Eidyn – probably the rock on which **Edinburgh Castle** now sits – rather than at Traprain. A generation later, after a siege of Din Eidyn in c. AD 638, independence was lost to the aggressively expanding Northumbrian kingdom of Bernicia.<sup>46</sup> (It is possible that Din Eidyn was also the principal tribal stronghold in earlier times, with Traprain an important, but subsidiary, power-centre.<sup>47</sup>)

However fascinating, the extremely fragmentary Roman literary evidence and the early Welsh epics cast little detailed light on the society and economy in which the fort at Castlelaw had been created and occupied, probably some centuries before the first Roman presence in Scotland. It is perhaps sufficient to say that it may be regarded as having been a centre of considerable, but secondary, importance, from the middle of the first millennium BC until about AD 200.

### 2.3.2 The place of Castlelaw in the archaeological narrative

The primary historical importance of Castlelaw subsists in its ability to contribute to evidence-based narratives about how society in what is now south-east Scotland may have operated, and changed, during the early to middle Iron Age.

Scotland’s hillforts have been the subject of much study and excavation. Attempts to understand them have given rise to numerous theories about their genesis, purpose, context and relationships to each other and to other Iron Age structures. Forts seem to demand consideration in a wider geographical context, since enclosures of broadly similar character occur throughout the majority of the British Isles and continental Europe.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Armit 1997, 102-3: ‘...Traprain Law remains the best, perhaps the only, candidate for a pre-Roman tribal ‘capital’ in the traditional sense.’

<sup>45</sup> Breeze 1996, 112-4.

<sup>46</sup> Aneirin 1998 – a new translation by Gillian Clarke is due to be published in May 2021.

<sup>47</sup> Research carried out by Nicholas Evans in relation to the early history of Edinburgh castle includes a summary of the 7<sup>th</sup> century context which may provide a relevant introduction here:

<https://www.historicenvironment.scot/archives-and-research/publications/publication/?publicationId=ab142e79-dc69-466a-bb61-aaa000f3461d>

(Accessed: 30 March 2022).

<sup>48</sup> Harding 2012.

Archaeological narratives which prevailed from the start of the last century until the 1970s linked the development of Scotland's hillforts (along with the brochs and duns of the far north and west) to the arrival of successive waves of settlers arriving from further south, moving at least partly in response to Roman expansionism on the Continent. This supposed process (which became known as 'diffusion') was deemed to have led to a 'Celtic' culture, based largely on pastoralism. Hillfort excavations in Scotland, on other than the smallest scale, were few in number and narratives were largely based on the comparison of site plans.

Based on a very small number of small-scale excavations, elaborate systems of development were drawn up, hypothesising how one type of defensive enclosure gave rise to the next, on the unproven assumption that these changes were almost synchronous across large areas (although with developments in Scotland always following after southern Britain) and that there was a single logical sequence of development across the whole country.<sup>49</sup> Some aspects of the construction and abandonment of hillforts were explicitly linked to the influence of the Roman army after its first appearance in Scotland in the late 70's AD.

These ideas were largely abandoned once increasing evidence began to emerge in the late 1970s and through the 1980s and 1990s (including from the nearby Broxmouth hillfort<sup>50</sup>) that many Scottish hillforts had been constructed long before the dates required for such explanations, and also that the sequence of enclosure boundaries varied markedly from site to site and over time. The idea that Scotland's hillforts ever grew to become hilltop towns, as may have been the case in the late centuries BC in southern Britain and on the near Continent, has also been abandoned, with the prevailing view being that, for most of their existence, hillforts functioned primarily as domestic and agricultural enclosures.<sup>51</sup>

Most recent studies have tended to emphasise the role of hillforts, alongside less heavily-defended enclosures, as central places or regional centres within their own territories, and to concentrate upon their detailed structure and possible functions within a local context, rather than considering them as elements of wider systems. The detailed differences between hillforts have been emphasised more than the similarities, and the emphasis has been on trying to understand the histories of individual sites. At the same time, high-level hypotheses have emerged, including the arrangement of daily activities within houses and settlements according to cosmological principles. Such generalised theories are hard to substantiate or refute with existing techniques.

Research into long-distance contacts and the large-scale movements of people have not been favoured in recent decades, due to their association with 'discredited diffusionism'. As the authors of one recent excavation report put it:

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<sup>49</sup> The assumed general sequence was first palisaded settlement then single-ditched fort then multiple ditched fort then undefended settlement. Illustrated in Armit 1997, 51 and elsewhere.

<sup>50</sup> Armit and Mackenzie 2013.

<sup>51</sup> Harding 2012, 87.

Celticism and the 'big picture' narratives that might link the ... community to some kind of Europe-wide Celtic continuum have become almost taboo for many Iron Age archaeologists.<sup>52</sup>

Despite the current lack of enthusiasm for such themes amongst Iron Age researchers, the influence on hillfort construction and use of the inter-regional exchange of ideas (and even of people) remains a valid field of inquiry. It remains to be seen whether recent advances in scientific methods, in particular the increasing use of ancestral DNA analysis of human remains, will drive a swing of the pendulum of fashion in research back towards larger geographical perspectives and reconsideration of the possibilities of population movement and long-range contact as opposed to (or at least combined with) indigenous development and local invention. That said, one of the defining features of the Scottish Iron Age is likely to stand in the way of such research – the near-total absence of human remains from the early and middle Iron Age.

Castlelaw, with its distinctive landscape setting and its undoubted potential for the survival of a wide range of types of physical evidence, has frequently been cited in the development of past and current theories about forts and about Iron Age settlement more widely. It continues to represent an extremely important research resource as new ways of understanding Scotland's Iron Age 'special places' are developed. In particular, the presence of one or possibly two timber-framed ramparts, places the site in a class for which Continental parallels exist. Such ramparts appear to be relatively rare in Scotland, but this may be no more than the lack of excavation, and the tendency of excavators to concentrate on the enclosed spaces within forts more than the boundary features, with the exception of gateways.

The presence of several forts and enclosures in similar locations along the southern flank of the Pentland Hills holds out the possibility of attempting to integrate Castlelaw and its companions into a coherent Iron Age landscape. It is, however, likely that the majority of the population lived in sites on the lower ground which have been reduced to cropmarks, or destroyed entirely, by two millennia of agricultural activity.<sup>53</sup>

The latest prehistoric phase evidenced at Castlelaw is the construction, use and deliberate abandonment of the souterrain, possibly with a circular house adjacent. The artefactual evidence for the date of the last material deposited within the souterrain fits closely with that from several other souterrains in eastern Scotland, all of which seem to have been decommissioned at the same time, in some cases with a degree of ceremony, in the late 2nd or earlier 3rd centuries AD. A range of possible explanations have been discussed, all centred around the idea of a major reorientation of social and political structures, perhaps associated with changes in Roman frontier policy. (Although formally beyond the bounds of the Roman Empire at this date, there is ample evidence for continuing Roman engagement in Scotland, particularly in the southern and eastern areas.)

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<sup>52</sup> Armit and Mackenzie 2013, 13.

<sup>53</sup> A pioneering project attempting to set Traprain Law into its landscape context was published by Haselgrove, C. (2009) *The Traprain Law Environs Project*. Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries Scotland, and offers a template for development in this regard.

### 2.3.3 More recent history: landscape change

Roy's map shows a sizeable cultivated area around the fort at a surprisingly high elevation above sea-level for that date, even allowing for its southerly aspect.<sup>54</sup> Recent survey has shown that the fort itself was cultivated, probably more than once and perhaps around this same mid-18th century date.<sup>55</sup> By the early 19th century a substantial house and farm had replaced the straggle of buildings shown on Roy's map, and the owner of Castlelaw was described as the most go-ahead of local proprietors in the Agricultural Improvement movement which was transforming rural lowland Scotland.

Few parishes have undergone a more complete change of external appearance than this since the date of the last Statistical Account [1791-7] ... At that time enclosures were rare, and in bad condition; now, the fields are all surrounded by proper fences and kept in excellent order. For the greater part of these improvements the parish is chiefly indebted to the taste and public spirit of the late Robert Trotter, Esq. of Castlelaw,<sup>56</sup> who spared no expense in improving his extensive property; and his example was speedily followed by other proprietors.<sup>57</sup>

The Castlelaw estate was acquired by the War Office (predecessor to the Ministry of Defence) in 1937. The primary land management aim remains to facilitate military training<sup>58</sup>, however agriculture (primarily grazing) and outdoor recreational access are also management uses and the estate lies within the Pentlands Regional Park. There are a number of safety and warning notices associated with the military activities. Live firing is restricted to a fenced live firing range west of Castlelaw Fort. The public are not allowed into this danger area. Red flags (daytime) and red lamps (night-time) are used when firing is taking place.

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<sup>54</sup> Roy 1755.

<sup>55</sup> RCAHMS 2006.

<sup>56</sup> The Trotter family of Castlelaw has an earlier claim to fame, as the dedicatees of a group of fiddle tunes by Robert Mackintosh, published in the late 18th century.

<sup>57</sup> NSA 1834, 322. A set of enclosed fields, more typical of early 19th century Improvements, is already shown around nearby Woodhouselee (formerly Fulford Tower) on Roy's map of 1755, but these are limited to a small area around the main house.

<sup>58</sup> Accessible online at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/defence-infrastructure-organisation-and-the-defence-training-estate#scotland> (Accessed: 30 March 2022).



## 2.4 Architectural and artistic values

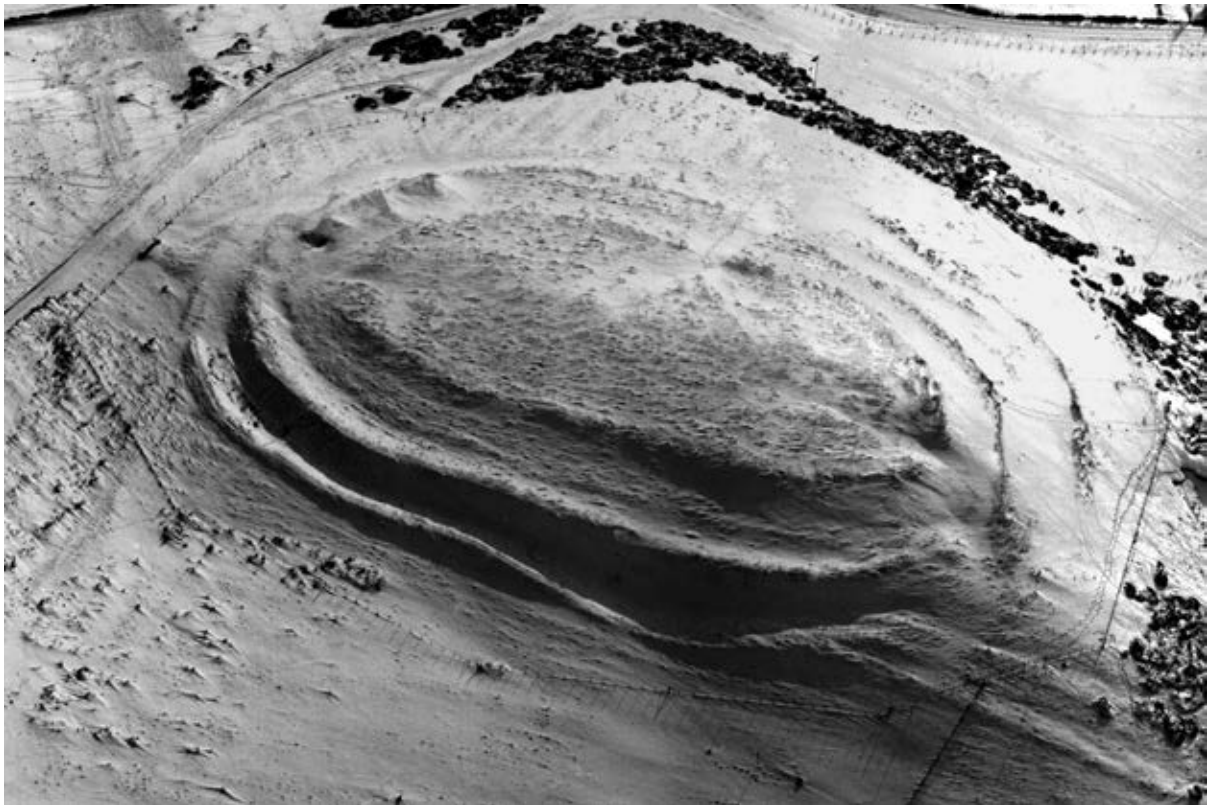


Figure 12: Oblique aerial view. © Crown Copyright: HES.

### 2.4.1 Architecture and design

Architectural value is difficult to ascribe to prehistoric earthwork monuments such as Castlelaw. The fort is now perceived as a field monument without any of the upstanding timber structures which would have given it a more impressive silhouette and today aerial views offer the best indication of the scale and shape of the site.

There seems little doubt that each phase of enclosure would have taken place as part of a clear overall plan, and almost certainly under some form of hierarchical supervision rather than as an egalitarian community enterprise. However, the variety of details present on hillforts, and the variability within even short sections of enclosure revealed by excavations on other hillfort sites, tends to suggest that a large degree of adaptability was allowable within the overall 'design concept'.

### 2.4.2 Construction

The limited understanding of the construction of the ramparts, available from relatively small-scale excavations, would place the inner and probably the middle rampart firmly within a widespread class of timber-laced or box ramparts, for which there are numerous examples in Scotland and further afield in western Europe. Likewise, the replacement of an earlier palisaded enclosure with a ramparted one is a pattern widely observed in southern

Scotland. The souterrain is also of a fairly typical plan and would fit very well in the more concentrated area of such structures in Angus and Perthshire. In short, the methods of construction deployed at Castlewart are mainstream for their type and period, and there are no obvious signs of innovation at Castlewart although, as with the overall site plan, there is a degree of adaptation to fit the site's specific parameters of geology, subsoil and topography.<sup>59</sup>

### 2.4.3 Artists' representations and photographic material

Castlewart is particularly well-served by historic photographs and documentation, with a sizeable archive held in HES collections. A series of black and white images of Childe's 1931-1932 excavations present a lively and informative perspective on the excavation methods of one of Britain's greatest prehistorians and also on his young and high-spirited student helpers.



Figure 13: Surveying 1930s-style – a sharply-dressed member of the Edinburgh League of Prehistorians. © Courtesy of HES (Vere Gordon Childe Collection).

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<sup>59</sup> Childe noted the hard and brittle nature of the underlying reddish trachyte. (Excavation report from 1932, contained within file MW1/318, National Records Scotland). The British Geological Survey record the site's bedrock geology as Andesite and Basaltic Andesite of the Carnethy Volcanic Member. Data courtesy of British Geological Survey onshore GeoIndex, accessible at: [https://mapapps2.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/home.html?\\_ga=2.256091465.370399042.1628510091-1586435652.1597923424](https://mapapps2.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/home.html?_ga=2.256091465.370399042.1628510091-1586435652.1597923424) (Accessed: 30 March 2022).



Figure 14: View of Castlelaw in landscape setting, looking SSW © Historic Environment Scotland.

## 2.5 Landscape and aesthetic values

Today, Castlelaw occupies a pleasant, grassy site, with a short steep approach on foot, and the option of a view from above, by continuing on the track towards Castlelaw Hill (see Figure 14). The outlook is superb, with a wide, sweeping view, and this is frequently mentioned in visitor comments on TripAdvisor, and other online reviewing platforms.<sup>60</sup> From the main road which runs close to the foot of the hills, and partly follows the line of a Roman road, the neat fields and woodlands of the Midlothian plain stretch east and south towards the Moorfoot Hills, with the town of Penicuik central in the view. Towards the north-east, the fringes of Edinburgh can be seen, and beyond them the East Lothian coastal plain, with the forts of Traprain Law and North Berwick Law visible on the horizon. Closer by, the valley of the Glencorse Burn lies to the south west, with the mid-19th century Glencorse Reservoir partly filling it. Across the burn the grassy slopes of Turnhouse Hill rise steeply.<sup>61</sup> On the southern side of this hill a small spur bears an Iron Age enclosure in a similar location to that of Castlelaw. The location of these sites overlooking the mouth of the Glencorse valley may be significant, as this valley provides the only low-level route towards the west which cuts through the Pentland Hills. Close at hand are the mainly 19th century agricultural buildings and house of Castlelaw Farm.

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<sup>60</sup> See Tripadvisor entries at: [https://tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction\\_Review-g186525-d4173053-Reviews-Castlelaw\\_Hill\\_Fort\\_Earth\\_House-Edinburgh\\_Scotland](https://tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction_Review-g186525-d4173053-Reviews-Castlelaw_Hill_Fort_Earth_House-Edinburgh_Scotland) (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

<sup>61</sup> The site, in AD 1666, of the Battle of Rullion Green, between Covenanters and Government forces. This adds interest to the view for those who are well-informed about local history.



*Figure 15: Oblique aerial photograph looking north east, centred on linear platforms of military firing range. Castlelaw fort beyond (to right of centre), with remains of the rig, cultivation terraces and palisaded settlement adjacent. © Crown Copyright: HES.*

To the west, cut into the flank of the hill, is a military firing range, with long level platforms carved out of the hillside (see Figure 15). On low rises near the fort are a flagpole and a beacon, parts of a circuit of warning posts around the military training area to signal when it is in use (infrequently at time of writing, in 2021). A broad and solidly surfaced gravel track, originally made for military purposes but now a popular access route for walkers, runs past the fort and curves around the northern flank of Castlelaw Hill to its summit.

## **2.6 Natural heritage values**

Castlelaw sits within the Pentland Hills Regional Park. The Park was designated in 1986: Regional Parks are defined as large areas of countryside, parts of which are available for informal countryside recreation.<sup>62</sup> Visitors to the site find themselves in an area of unimproved dry acidic grassland, with dwarf heath, and damp neutral grassland in the ditches – all of which are priority habitats within the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. The fort

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<sup>62</sup> Further details available via NatureScot SiteLink at: <https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/8721> (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

overlooks a range of other habitats: arable and pasture fields, hedgerows, small areas of conifer and broad-leaved woodland and patches of gorse and broom. A wide variety of farmland birds can be seen and heard, along with moorland species such as curlew *Numenius arquata* and green plover *Vanellus vanellus*. Common buzzards *Buteo buteo* are frequently seen overhead. The only wild mammals regularly seen on site are rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus*.

## 2.7 Contemporary/use values

To date (2021) there has not been a formal assessment of the value of Castlelaw to contemporary communities, of either of geography or interest. The following paragraphs are therefore based on readily available sources, and informal on-site observations.

The value of Castlelaw for contemporary local communities lies partly in its interesting history and partly in its ease of access.

The site's location, close to the parking area and starting point for a well-used access point to the Pentland Hills, means that it comes to the attention of many who might otherwise be unlikely to make a special trip to visit it. Such 'accidental' users range from picnickers through dog-walkers to long-distance walkers and runners.

The military markers adjacent to the site, and occasional use of the adjacent training area, do not seem to be regarded as particularly detrimental, though the sound of unexpected gunfire can be alarming. To some local residents, these aspects reflect the long-standing presence of the Army in the area, with major barracks and residential quarters in the nearby village of Glencorse and also on the southern side of the city of Edinburgh, at Dreghorn and Redford.

Images of the site have been used in archaeological guides<sup>63</sup> and reference works, but do not feature prominently in general guidebooks to the area.

On-site interpretation is currently provided by two interpretation panels set just within the fenced enclosure. An old but well cared-for cast metal sign directs visitors from the car parking area up the steep grassy path to "Castlelaw fort and earth house", using the older term for the souterrain.

## 3. MAJOR GAPS IN UNDERSTANDING

There are many unanswered questions surrounding hillforts, despite over a century of excavation, study and theorising. A deeper understanding of the individual history and use(s) of Castlelaw would contribute to a broader understanding of the wider phenomenon of hillforts, of which Scotland has several hundred. Having been completely emptied in

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<sup>63</sup> For example, Baldwin 1997.

1931-2, the souterrain has less potential in this regard, although the artefacts recovered still retain the potential to contribute to ongoing studies.

Many of the questions below are generic and could be asked about any Iron Age site.

- What was the nature of occupation on the site before the visible fort was constructed?
- How large was any 'territory' around Castlelaw, and did its extent change over time?
- How does the fort relate to the several small forts and enclosures along the southern flank of the Pentland Hills? Are these contemporary and if so, what was the nature of their interaction?
- What was the purpose of the enclosing earthworks – were they primarily intended as defences against attack, or were they more in the nature of boundaries which controlled access to a special place?
- What was their sequence and construction method – were there two or more phases?
- Are there additional features yet to be identified on site?
- What activities took place within the enclosed area? Was it occupied for extended periods of time or only for occasional /seasonal use? How did use vary over time? Were specialised activities/industries undertaken on site? And in particular, was the fort still permanently occupied during the Roman presence in southern Scotland, and on what scale?
- When were the boundaries of Castlelaw abandoned, or at least why did the maintenance and replacement of the earthworks cease? Did this mark a major change in society? How has the landscape and vegetation changed over time?<sup>64</sup>
- What was the character and duration of the post-enclosure settlement, indicated by the souterrain and the possible house foundations found in excavation? What was the original form of the souterrain roof?
- Was the site re-occupied at any period after the Iron Age and, if so, for what purpose(s)?

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<sup>64</sup> Childe's excavation report of 1931 noted the existence of oak, birch and willow. Contained within file MW1/318, National Records of Scotland.

- What can be learned about the post-Iron Age cultivation of the site: can this be dated, or the crops grown there identified?

Added to the specific questions above, there are major knowledge gaps relating to the period to which the monument belongs. Key research questions relating to the Iron Age as a whole are contained within the ScARF National Framework Iron Age report.<sup>65</sup>

Please note, the research for this document was undertaken during 2020-2021 with limited access to archives and resources, as a result of Covid-19. While every attempt was made for accuracy throughout the statement, errors or omissions may remain. Please direct comments or suggestions to [CRTenquiries@hes.scot](mailto:CRTenquiries@hes.scot)

## 4 ASSOCIATED PROPERTIES

### Associated properties managed by HES:

- **The Chesters**, Drem (fort, East Lothian)
- **Edin's Hall** (fort, broch and settlement, Scottish Borders)
- **Caterthuns** (Brown and White) (forts, Angus)
- **Holyrood Park** (fort, City of Edinburgh)
- **Edinburgh Castle** (castle on site of fort, City of Edinburgh).
- Various souterrains in State care, including **Tealing** (Angus), **Culsh** (Aberdeenshire) and **Ardestie** (Angus).

**Other associated sites: Sites listed below are all accessible to the public but are not in State care. Visitors should pay attention to local signage and requests, and observe the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.**<sup>66</sup>

- Pentland Hills forts and enclosures, including: Hillend Hill, Turnhouse Hill and Camp Law. Also, the adjacent Castle Knowe – none of these is as well-preserved as Castlelaw, but all have fine settings
- Traprain Law (fort, East Lothian) – possibly the 'capital' of the Votadini
- North Berwick Law (fort, East Lothian) – a fine view, but fort is poorly preserved
- White Castle (fort, East Lothian) – a fine example of a small fort, like Castlelaw not in a particularly elevated location
- Black and White Meldons (forts, Scottish Borders)

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<sup>65</sup> Accessible at: <https://scarf.scot/national/iron-age-panel-report/> (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

<sup>66</sup> Available at: <https://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/> (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

- Eildon Hill North (fort, Scottish Borders) – major hilltop enclosure, with traces of many circular house foundations and a landmark in Roman times (there is some evidence that the enclosure may be pre-Iron Age).

## 5. KEYWORDS

Castlelaw; Iron Age; hillfort; fort; rampart; ditch; souterrain; enclosure; cultivation; Roman; Votadini; Gododdin; Pentlands; Gordon Childe; Margaret Simpson, Margaret Crichton Mitchell; Edinburgh League of Prehistorians; Stuart Piggott; Peggy Piggott.

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Note: Footnotes throughout the text offer page numbers where appropriate. If no page number is given, this indicates that reference is being made to the general thrust of the publication cited rather than a specific point of detail.

## **Further Resources**

Canmore ID: 51871  
Site Number: NT26SW 2  
NGR: NT 22900 63870

Canmore entry: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/51871/castle-law-glencorse>

Scheduling Description: SM90064, details accessible at:  
<https://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM90064>

A number of artefacts from the hill fort are held within the National Museums of Scotland collections. Their collections database can be searched via: <https://www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/search-our-collections/>

Images of the site may be viewed on SCRAN  
[https://www.scran.ac.uk/database/results.php?QUICKSEARCH=1&search\\_term=castlelaw+fort](https://www.scran.ac.uk/database/results.php?QUICKSEARCH=1&search_term=castlelaw+fort)

For information on the cup-marked stone within the souterrain, see:  
<https://www.rockart.scot/rock-art-database/?scrapToolsaction=datatools:panel&id=2E9CE9C2-C580-4D5C-AB968B04BFAE1277>

A 3D digital model of the cup-marked stone within the souterrain, can be viewed at:  
<https://sketchfab.com/3d-models/castle-law-souterrain-cup-marked-stone-89bbdabb06be4b238a22f00b1e797f50>

More information on Scotland's Rock Art Project (SCRAP) can be found at:  
<https://www.rockart.scot/>

Further information on Iron Age Scotland is to be found at <https://scarf.scot/national/iron-age-panel-report/>

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: TIMELINE

<b>Iron Age</b>	
Mid – 1st millennium BC	Possible palisaded settlement.
Mid/late 1st millennium BC	Palisaded settlement reinforced to form inner rampart.
Late 1st millennium BC	Addition of outer ramparts.
BC / AD divide	Ramparts no longer maintained?
1st/2nd centuries AD	Souterrain built into ditch behind middle rampart, with nearby roundhouse.
c. 200 AD	Souterrain infilled. Whole site abandoned?
<b>Medieval</b>	Cultivation over interior and ramparts, southern ramparts modified as terraces.
<b>Modern</b>	
1816	Mapped as ‘Roman Camp’ on James Knox’ Map of the Shire of Edinburgh. <sup>67</sup>
1843	First mention in printed text: New Statistical Account for Parish of Glencorse (sic; published 1845). <sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> South east section, accessible via NLS at: <https://maps.nls.uk/view/74400234> (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

<sup>68</sup> NSA accessible at: [https://stataccscot.edina.ac.uk/static/statacc/dist/viewer/nsa-vol1-Parish\\_record\\_for\\_Glencorse\\_in\\_the\\_county\\_of\\_Edinburgh\\_in\\_volume\\_1\\_of\\_account\\_2/nsa-vol1-p316-parish-edinburgh-glencorse?search=castlelaw](https://stataccscot.edina.ac.uk/static/statacc/dist/viewer/nsa-vol1-Parish_record_for_Glencorse_in_the_county_of_Edinburgh_in_volume_1_of_account_2/nsa-vol1-p316-parish-edinburgh-glencorse?search=castlelaw) (Accessed: 30 March 2022). The Old Statistical Account for the Parish (published 1795) had referred more generally to “some vestiges of camps at Castlelaw”, Accessible at: [https://stataccscot.edina.ac.uk/static/statacc/dist/viewer/osa-vol15-Parish\\_record\\_for\\_Glencorse\\_in\\_the\\_county\\_of\\_Edinburgh\\_in\\_volume\\_15\\_of\\_account\\_1/osa-vol15-p441-parish-edinburgh-glencorse?search=castlelaw](https://stataccscot.edina.ac.uk/static/statacc/dist/viewer/osa-vol15-Parish_record_for_Glencorse_in_the_county_of_Edinburgh_in_volume_15_of_account_1/osa-vol15-p441-parish-edinburgh-glencorse?search=castlelaw) (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

1852	Appears as 'fort' on Ordnance Survey 1st edition map (published 1854). <sup>69</sup>
1913	RCAHMS plan (published 1929).
c.1917	Land taken over as military training area (practice trenches nearby).
1924	Fort protected as a Scheduled Monument of national importance, under Section 12 of the Ancient Monuments Consolidation and Amendment Act of 1913. <sup>70</sup>
1931-2	Excavations by Childe on ramparts and east gate – souterrain discovered in 1932 (published 1933).
1933	The souterrain is taken into State care, via Minute of Agreement. The guardianship boundary is defined as a semi-circular area encompassing the souterrain alone, with the rest of the fort excluded from the Deed. <sup>71</sup> The souterrain is protected by a locked gate, the key to which kept at Castle Law Farm. Public access is originally via permit, issued via the Office of Works in Edinburgh. <sup>72</sup>
1935-1936	Further clearance of the souterrain overseen by Margaret Simpson, in preparation for consolidation works. Installation of a reformed concrete slab roof over the souterrain, covered with a mound of earth. Erection of a fence enclosing the semi-circular guardianship area. <sup>73</sup>
1937+	War Department purchase Woodhouselee estate, including Castle Law Fort and souterrain. <sup>74</sup> Interdepartmental transfer of site from War Department to Office of Works as a monument under Schedule A of the War Office Memorandum concerning Alterations and Maintenance of Historic Buildings. <sup>75</sup> Guardianship area is now

<sup>69</sup> Six-inch first edition OS map, Sheet 12, Edinburghshire, accessible via NLS at:

<https://maps.nls.uk/view/74426712> (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

<sup>70</sup> c.f. Letter from M. Connolly to Trustees of the late Alex E.C. Trotter, dated 23/02/1924. Contained within file MW1/319, National Records of Scotland.

See too Scheduled Monument description SM90064, accessible at:

<https://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM90064> (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

<sup>71</sup> Measuring 43ft max E-W by 107ft max N-S. Minute of Agreement between the owner, Mr D.J.W. Dundas of Woodhouselee, and The Commissioners of Works, dated 21/08/1933. Contained within file MW1/319, National Records of Scotland.

<sup>72</sup> Memo dated 19/05/1932. Contained within file MW1/318, National Records of Scotland.

<sup>73</sup> Memo from A. Heasman, dated 19/05/1932. Contained within file MW1/318, National Records of Scotland.

<sup>74</sup> Memo from J. Wilson Paterson, dated 17/02/1937. Contained within file MW1/319, National Records of Scotland.

<sup>75</sup> See letter from J Wilson, Command Land Agent, to Secretary of H.M. Office of Works, dated 06/09/1937. Contained within file MW1/319, National Records of Scotland.

	extended from the souterrain alone, to an area of 3.08 acres, encompassing most of the fort. Boundary marker stones installed to define extended PIC area, and a six-pointed star-shaped “no digging” sign erected in each of the four corners, signifying that it was a scheduled monument which military manoeuvres should avoid. <sup>76</sup>
	Ongoing intensive use of neighbouring training area by military.
1948	Excavation by Piggotts (published 1954).
1958	Star-shaped markers found to be ineffective, with mechanised vehicles still entering the area during manoeuvres, and causing damage to the monument. Fence erected at eastern extremity of Guardianship area, close to the souterrain, to prevent vehicle access. <sup>77</sup>
1959-1964	Lengthy negotiations between Office of Works (OOW) and War Department, around extending Guardianship boundaries to ‘a safer distance from the earthworks, particularly on the vulnerable East side.’ <sup>78</sup> The OOW informally assumed control of more land in January 1960, <sup>79</sup> with the Guardianship area enlarged according to a plan prepared in 1958 (Figure 16). <sup>80</sup> Marker stones and perimeter fence re-sited further east to enclose this extension (fence erected by 1961 on the east side; fort not enclosed on the NW side until 1973 <sup>81</sup> ). Conditional transfer letter dated Jan 1963. <sup>82</sup> Transfer concluded 1964. <sup>83</sup>
1960	OS resurvey (1:2500).

<sup>76</sup> The location of which were agreed by J.S. Richardson on 20/09/37. Marked on a plan contained within file MW1/319, National Records of Scotland.

<sup>77</sup> Memo from M.D. King dated 11/09/1959, letter from T Wilson to Command Land Agent, dated 30/09/1959, and letter from M.D. King to Pawsey dated 22/11/1961. All contained within file DD27/1007, National Records of Scotland.

<sup>78</sup> Extract from memo by W.W.M.B. dated 28/08/1959. Contained within file DD27/1007, National Records of Scotland.

<sup>79</sup> Letter from M.D. King to Mr Pawsey, dated 22/11/1961. Contained within file DD27/1007, National Records of Scotland.

<sup>80</sup> Proposed extension defined in plan dated 02/06/1958 (reproduced at Figure 16). included in letter from T Wilson to Command Land Agent, dated 30/09/1959. Contained within file DD27/1007, National Records of Scotland.

<sup>81</sup> Letter to the GOC from Miss D Douglas dated Feb 1973 states site not fully enclosed on the NW side (and army jeep gaining access) but plans to fully fence the Guardianship area. Contained within file DD27/1007, National Records of Scotland. New fence set out in Sept 1973 (internal note from Hugh McGee dated 28/09/1973. Contained within file DD27/1007, National Records of Scotland.).

<sup>82</sup> Letter from D.M. Pawsey to The Secretary, dated 03/01/1963, and War Office Memo for Command Land Agent, dated 03/02/1964. Contained within file DD27/1007, National Records of Scotland.

<sup>83</sup> Deed deposition record dated 10/02/1964. Contained within file DD27/1007, National Records of Scotland.

1960s – 1980s	<p>Jan 1966, the Army propose creating a new Electric Target Range close to the western boundary of Castlelaw,<sup>84</sup> but proposals apparently dropped by Dec 1967.<sup>85</sup></p> <p>In 1968 drainage and a sump were installed inside the souterrain. Pooling was noted internally so drainage may not have been functioning at that point as it had been intended, further adding to the moisture load in the space and which remains a conservation issue.</p> <p>Redevelopment of rifle range proposed again in 1976, to accommodate a new Gallery Range and Electric Target Range.<sup>86</sup></p> <p>Following a public inquiry in February 1979,<sup>87</sup> the remodelling of the military firing ranges eventually went ahead and were completed in 1985.<sup>88</sup> These were built to the west, in sight (and sound) of the fort; warning flagpoles and beacons erected nearby.</p>
2005	<p>Detailed topographic survey and digital terrain model (RCAHMS) identifies remains of post- Iron Age cultivation. '2.1.4 Conservation and other work' above provides history of protection measures.</p>
2021	<p>At time of writing (2021), AOC Archaeology Group are undertaking survey and geophysical survey across the site, as part of Operation Nightingale, a Defence Infrastructure Organisation initiative to support service personnel and veterans through archaeology.</p>

<sup>84</sup> Minutes of meeting held at HQ Scottish Command on 11/01/1966 to Discuss Target Ranges. Contained within file DD27/1007, National Records of Scotland.

<sup>85</sup> Internal memo dated 12/12/57. Contained within file DD27/1007, National Records of Scotland.

<sup>86</sup> Letter from A. Cowan to SDD, dated 17/12/1976. Contained within file DD27/1007, National Records of Scotland.

<sup>87</sup> Letter to SDD from Miss J P Nicol dated 16/02/1979. Contained within file DD27/1007, National Records of Scotland.

<sup>88</sup> The Glencorse, Castlelaw Range has its own entry on Canmore, accessible at: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/110879/glencorse-castlelaw-range> (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

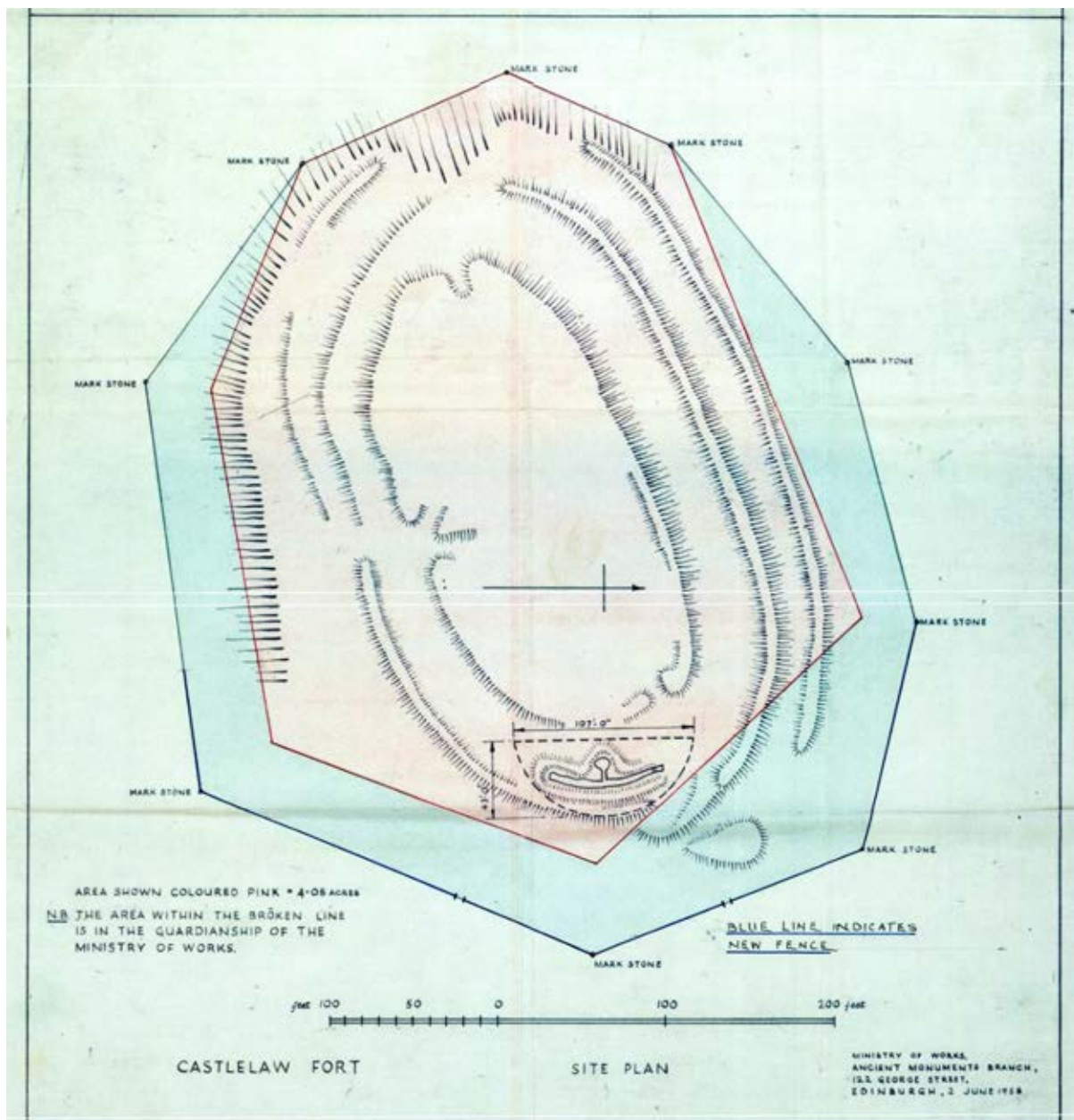


Figure 16: Ministry of Works plan of Castlelaw, showing the three different stages of Guardianship boundaries: the dashed semi-circle encompassing the souterrain represents the earliest guardianship area, defined in 1933. In 1937 this boundary was extended to include most of the hill fort [shaded red], and further extended in 1960 to the wider area (shaded blue), as defined in this plan produced in 1958 © Crown Copyright: HES.

## APPENDIX 2: SOUTERRAINS

A souterrain is a stone-built structure, built and used in the period known as the Iron Age. They generally take the form of a subterranean (or partially subterranean) passage and chamber, cut into bedrock or local till, and lined with stonework. In the case of Castlelaw, the souterrain was built into an existing quarry ditch, lying between the hillfort's innermost and second rampart.

The term 'souterrain' draws upon the French to describe an underground structure, and this type of site is classed as such across most of Scotland, though some examples, mainly in Orkney, are still known by the older term 'earth house'.<sup>89</sup>

Souterrains were a relatively common feature of Iron Age settlement in Scotland, and many of these structures have been discovered, though few are still accessible to visit.<sup>90</sup> They vary in size and form but tend to fit in to one of several well-defined regional groups which share common characteristics.

Once thought to be isolated sites, modern archaeology shows that most earth houses were accessed from the interior of roundhouses. Where the archaeology survives, traces of settlement usually occur on the ground surface above and may include crop marks and post holes indicating the location of roundhouses, together with deposits of ash and midden (refuse) material, and occasionally stone walling. At Castlelaw, excavation revealed an arc of post holes adjacent to the entrance of the souterrain, which may have related to an associated circular wooden house. At other contemporary sites it has been shown that some roundhouses were built in isolation, while others occurred in groups suggesting that they were part of village life.

Many souterrains were examined prior to modern archaeological techniques, and few contained significant deposits, making their interpretation difficult. This interpretation is also complicated by the long period over which they were in use. While the sites in the north (such as **Rennibister** and **Grain**) seem to have been active in the first millennium BC, some may have earlier dates<sup>91</sup> and further to the south they are much later: like Castlelaw, in Perthshire and Angus, the archaeological evidence indicates that earth houses were common into the earlier centuries AD (e.g. **Tealing**).

To date, souterrains have been variously understood as defensive refuges, ceremonial sites and storage chambers. While their precise purpose remains unclear, it is likely that they were multi-functional. Current interpretations suggest that while earth houses provided efficient storage facilities for the inhabitants of the associated settlement, they were also likely to have been used for elements of domestic ritual in a society where spiritual and non-spiritual behaviours were less separated than they are today.

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<sup>89</sup> The CANMORE Thesaurus notes that the term 'souterrain' is now preferred over that of 'earth house' <https://canmore.org.uk/thesaurus/1/532/SOUTERRAIN> (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

<sup>90</sup> In addition to Castlelaw, a number of other examples are in State care and may be visited: **Ardestie, Carlungie, Culsh, Grain, Rennibister** and **Tealing**. Prior to visiting, please check current access information, at: <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/> (Accessed: 30 March 2022).

<sup>91</sup> Carruthers, pers comm.