
EDC 24: Roman Baths, Bearsden

Grid reference: [NS 54616 72089]

Site type: Manmade artifact

Site ownership: Not known (Historic Scotland?)

Current use: Urban

Field surveyor: Mike Browne & Hugh Barron

Current geological designations: None

Date visited: 19th March 2009

Site map

(Figure 24) Roman Baths Location Map

Summary description

The remains of the Bearsden Roman Bath House are located a little to the east of the Bearsden Fort, which is thought to be one of those built along the Antonine Wall to house the troops. Demolition of Victorian mansions and an archaeological dig in 1973 revealed most of the ground plan of the fort. The baths are reputed to be one of the best preserved examples of a bath house in Scotland. The site is cared for by Historic Scotland.

An information board illustrates how the Bath House would have appeared when in use and puts the building into a regional context, but there is no mention of the materials used to construct the building.

The buildings appear to have been built from local Carboniferous blonde sandstone. The original flagstones are of a similar sandstone, some of which display excellent fossilised ripples.

EDC 24: Stratigraphy and rock types

Age: Carboniferous Formation: Not known

Rock type: Sandstone

Assessment of site value

Access and safety

Aspect/Description

Road access and parking Car Parking some 250 m distance west of site

Safety of access Road traffic main hazard

Safety of exposure Low risk of tripping and falling over

Permission to visit Open access

Current condition good

Current conflicting activities none

Restricting conditions none

Nature of exposure Cultural built heritage

Culture, heritage & economic

Historic, archaeological & literary associations Roman Baths. Rating: 9.

Aesthetic landscape Urban environment. Rating: 2.

History of earth sciences None known. Rating: 0.

Economic geology None recorded. Rating: 0.

EDC 24: Geoscientific merit

EDC 24: Roman Baths, Bearsden. Geoscientific merit.

Total Geoscientific merit score. Rating: 5.

Current site value

Community. Rating: 9.

Education. Rating: 5.

Fragility and potential use of the site

Fragility None

Potential use Higher/Further Education, School, On-site Interpretation, Multidisciplinary

Geodiversity value

This site clearly displays Bearsden's long-standing link between geology and the built environment. Romans appeared to have used the local sandstone for construction of the baths. The site additionally displays how the nature of the stone has determined how and where it is used; thicker-bedded stone, which produced blocks which were used for the construction of walls, whereas thinner-bedded stone was carefully extracted in sheets and used as slabs on the floor. Chisel marks still visible on original stones. Its geodiversity value is enhanced on account of its link with archaeology (Scheduled Ancient Monument) and accessible location.

Photographs

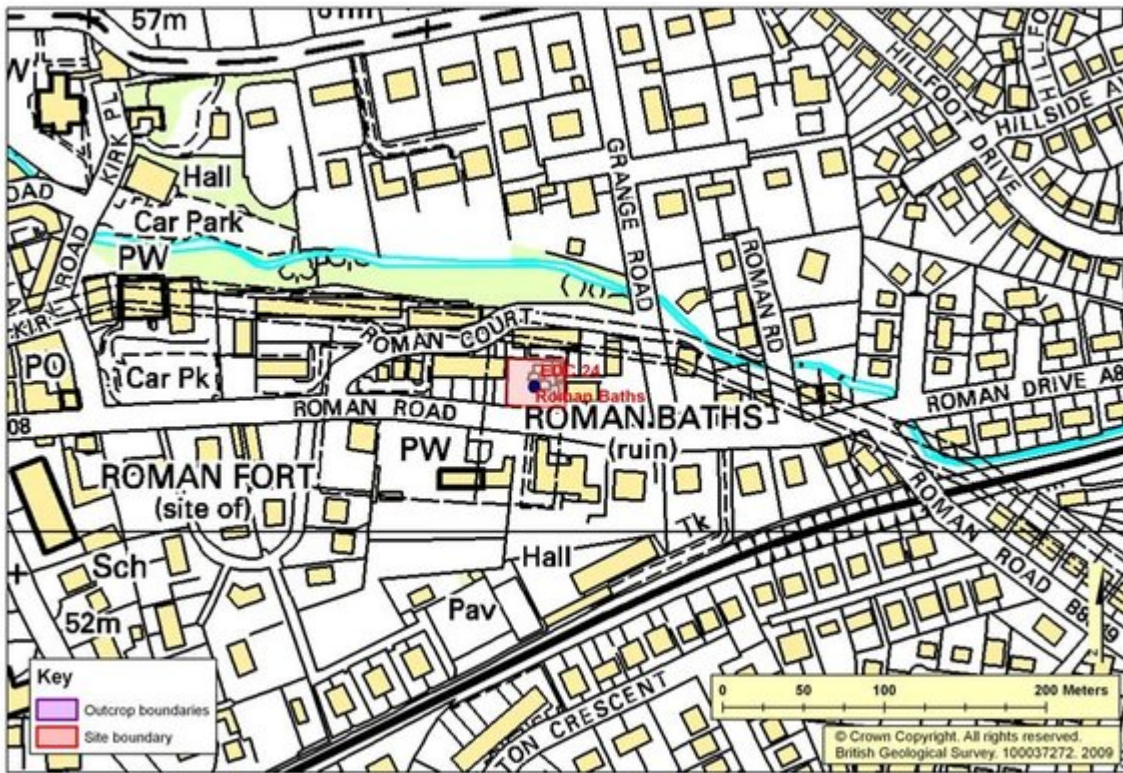
(Photo 141) View across the remains of the Roman bath-house at Bearsden. Viewed from west side.

(Photo 142) Existing interpretation board at the Roman bath-house. There is no mention of the materials used for building.

(Photo 143) View across the stone remains of the Roman bath-house. The buildings appear to have been constructed mainly from local Carboniferous sandstones.

(Photo 144) Close-up of the original flagstone paving at the Roman bath-house, which displays fossilised ripples.

Bibliography



(Figure 24) Roman Baths location map.

GeoScientific Merit	Rarity	Quality	Literature/ Collections	1st
Litho Stratigraphy	0	0	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sedimentology	2	3	0	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Igneous/Mineral/ Metamorphic Geology	0	0	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
Structural Geology	0	0	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
Palaeontology	0	0	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
Geomorphology	0	0	0	<input type="checkbox"/>

EDC 24: Roman Baths, Bearsden. Geoscientific merit.



(Photo 141) View across the remains of the Roman bath-house at Bearsden. Viewed from west side.

BEARSDEN ROMAN BATH-HOUSE

The Antonine Wall
The Antonine Wall was built in the 140s AD by the Roman army on the orders of the Emperor Antoninus Pius. 40 Roman miles (64km) long, it ran from modern Bearsden on the Forth to Old Kilpatrick on the Clyde. The Wall consisted of a rampart of turf, 3-4m high, placed on a stone base 4-5m (15 Roman feet) wide, and probably topped by a timber breastwork. In front lay a wide and deep ditch. Along the Wall were forts, usually about 1km apart, fortlets and beacon platforms for signalling, all linked by a road, the military way. One of these forts lay at Bearsden.

▲ Monument in east of the Sanctuary of Iona for Scotland

The Roman Fort at Bearsden
Attached to the rear of the Antonine Wall rampart, the fort covered 1 hectare (2.5 acres). The defences consisted of a turf rampart on a stone base within one to three ditches, likely for livestock, stables, granaries, a workshop and store-houses, but no headquarters building (usually found in the centre of the fort), no commanding officer's house, and insufficient barracks for even the smallest regular unit in the Roman army. The garrison was probably a detachment of cavalry from the Fourth Cohort of Gauls stationed at Cardross 2.4km to the west. Nothing can now be seen of the fort. The Roman military way, which passed through the fort, is under the modern street, Roman Road.

The Bath-house
The bath-house lay to the east of the fort, within an annex. Its walls were of timber and stone, plastered inside and out, on the interior a special waterproof plaster made from lime mortar and ground tile was used. Some windows were glazed. The roof was of timber. The floors were of stone; those in the heated rooms were raised on walls or pillars to allow air, heated at the furnace, to circulate below. In the hot rooms and the hot dry rooms, the walls also were heated by air rising through cavities in the walls.
The building was used by all the soldiers in the fort. On leaving the changing rooms the bathers entered the cold room, which formed the central hall of the building. Here he was faced with a choice: he could go to his left into the hot dry room, or straight on into the first of three steam rooms of increasing warmth.
The bathers progressed through each room in the steam range, resting on stone benches and rubbing themselves with oil, to be later scraped off with the strig.

by a special knife. After walking in the hot bath, the bathers stretched his legs to the cold room, finally taking a dip in the cold bath before dressing and returning to the fort. As the bath-house was warm and comfortable it was probably used for relaxation as well as bathing.

To the north of the bath-house of the steam range lies part of an earlier bath-house. This was demolished by the Romans before completion, the stones being re-used in the present building. The reason for this change in plan is not known.

The Latrine
To your right lies the communal latrine. This was built against the north face of the east rampart of the annex. Drains from the bath-house led to wash the sewage out of the latrine and into the fort ditches. Wooden seats would have been erected over the ditch to allow channel around the inside of the west and south walls of the latrine. Washable sponges were used instead of toilet paper.

Display
When discovered in 1971 some original wall and floor plans survived, but extensive work is needed to restore. In the cold bath this plan has been replaced by a modern one. Hot and cold water derived from a flag (now lost) replaced by modern flag. Concrete has been used to mark the position of red brick walls. In the steam range the basements have been filled with gravel to protect the pillars.

Roman Sites to See in Bearsden and Glasgow
East of the bath-house, along Roman Road and Buckle Road (the line of the military way) two short stretches of the stone base of the Antonine Wall are exposed to view in New Kilpatrick Cemetery. To the west along Roman Road, a length of ditch can be seen in Roman Park, off Iain Road.
The objects discovered during the archaeological excavations of 1971-81 are housed in the Hamilton Museum, Glasgow University, on University Avenue, off Byres Road, where a selection is on permanent display.

This monument is in the east of the Sanctuary of Iona for Scotland
Borough Development Department, Ancient Monuments Branch, Edinburgh
Site gifted by Woodhouse Developments Limited.
Designed by Frank Stubbs, Edinburgh. Reconstruction drawings by Mike Wilson.

(Photo 142) Existing interpretation board at the Roman bath-house. There is no mention of the materials used for building.



(Photo 143) View across the stone remains of the Roman bath-house. The buildings appear to have been constructed mainly from local Carboniferous sandstones.



(Photo 144) Close-up of the original flagstone paving at the Roman bath-house, which displays fossilised ripples.