

The artefacts recovered during the “Extreme Archaeology” Television programme’s excavations at Tintagel Castle, Cornwall 2003.

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A number of artefacts, 61 in total were recovered during excavations by the “Extreme Archaeology” Team on Tintagel Island in 2003.

The artefacts studied for this report come from two excavations. Trench 1, which was situated below the Inner Ward examining an old cliff fall scar that appears to have become reactivated, and Trench 2 which was dug within a corner of a prominent building on the Southern Terrace that had been identified by the Royal Commission survey of 1985 in an attempt to evaluate the age of these structures.

Pottery comprises the largest group within the assemblage; however there was also stone artefacts, and bone. Currently all the artefacts are being temporarily stored in the CAU offices, Kennall building, Old County Hall, Truro, Cornwall.

The total number of finds from each area are summarised in the following tables.

Context No: Trench 1. Inner Ward, Lowest Terrace. Unstratified.

MATERIAL	WEIGHT (g)	NO OF ITEMS	OBJECT NO	INTERIM BOX NO
Pottery				
Early Medieval	246g	12		1
Medieval	30g	2		1
Stonework				
Slate	846g	2		1
8 sherds of Bi amphora, including four decorated with grooves, and one handle scar. 5 th to 6 th centuries AD. 1 body sherd of Bii amphora with distinctive ridging. 5 th to 6 th centuries AD. 1 amphora foot spike Imported Coarseware Fabric 19. 5 th to 6 th centuries AD. 2 body sherds Imported Coarseware Fabric 1 (Eastern Mediterranean Red Ware). 5 th to 6 th centuries AD. 2 Body sherds Cornish Medieval Coarseware. 13 th to 14 th centuries AD. 2 large perforated roofing slates most likely Medieval in date. 13 th to 14 th centuries AD.				

Context No: Trench 1. Inner Ward, Lowest Terrace. Context (101).

MATERIAL	WEIGHT (g)	NO OF ITEMS	OBJECT NO	INTERIM BOX NO
Pottery				
Medieval	26g	1		1
Bone				
Animal	3g	2		1
1 rim sherd of a cooking pot, Cornish Medieval Coarseware (Bunnings Park/Stuffleware). 13 th to 14 th centuries AD. 2 animal bones.				

Context No: Trench 1. Inner Ward, Lowest Terrace. Context (102).

MATERIAL	WEIGHT (g)	NO OF ITEMS	OBJECT NO	INTERIM BOX NO
Pottery				
Early Medieval	293g	20		1
Stonework				
Pebble	28g	1		1
Unknown	195g	1		1
Bone				
Animal	26g	10		1
<p>2 co-joining sherds forming the rim of a Phocian Red slipped Ware (PRSW) Form 3 bowl with rouletted decoration around circumference. 5th to 6th centuries AD. 2 body sherds of Bi amphora with incised line decoration. 5th to 6th centuries AD. 1 body sherd Bi amphora clipped to disc (broken in half). Spindle whorl rough out? Or plug removed to allow insertion of a tap into amphora. 5th to 6th centuries AD. 3 body sherds Bi amphora. 5th to 6th centuries AD. 6 body sherds Bii amphora, one with distinct external ridging. 5th to 6th centuries AD. 5 sherds Bv amphora. 5th to 6th centuries AD. 1 body sherd Imported Coarseware Fabric 21 (Square Profiled Ridge Ware). 5th to 6th centuries AD. 10 animal bone and teeth fragments. 5th to 6th centuries AD? 1 discoidal shaped, water rounded slate pebble. Gaming counter? 5th to 6th centuries AD? 1 large fragment of burnt (iron rich) stone. Quartzite?</p>				

Context No Inner Ward, Lowest Terrace. Below buttresses. Unstratified.

MATERIAL	WEIGHT (g)	NO OF ITEMS	OBJECT NO	INTERIM BOX NO
Pottery				
Early Medieval	< 0.5g	1		1
Stonework				
Pebble	30g	2		1
Slate		2		1
<p>1 small scrap of Imported Pottery, possibly PRSW. 5th to 6th centuries AD. 2 very large roofing slates, perforated and trimmed to shape. Medieval. 2 small water rounded pebbles (1 white quartz pebble, one of slate), gaming counters? 5th to 6th centuries AD?</p>				

Context No: Trench 2. Southern Terrace. Unstratified. Surface finds.

MATERIAL	WEIGHT (g)	NO OF ITEMS	OBJECT NO	INTERIM BOX NO
Pottery				
Early Medieval	30g	2		1
<p>1 plain body sherd of Bi amphora. 5th to 6th centuries AD. 1 body sherd of Biv amphora. 5th to 6th centuries AD.</p>				

Context No: Trench 2. Southern Terrace. Context (201).

MATERIAL	WEIGHT (g)	NO OF ITEMS	OBJECT NO	INTERIM BOX NO
Pottery				
Early Medieval	33g	3		1
Stonework				
Slate	1030g	1		
1 body sherd Romano-British Gabbroic ware. 4 th to 6 th centuries AD. 2 body sherds Bi amphora. 5 th to 6 th centuries AD. 1 large notched slate. 5 th to 6 th centuries AD.				

In total 36 sherds of pottery were examined. Of these, 3 sherds proved to be Medieval in date (all recovered from Trench 1), the rest belonging to the Romano-British and post-Roman periods. Several different fabrics were identified within the assemblage.

The Romano-British Period.

A single sherd belongs to the Romano-British period of occupation. Radiocarbon dates from the excavations on the Lower Terrace, Site C by the University of Glasgow, give a range c 395-460 AD for structures related to this phase (Harry and Morris 1997). Pottery of this period can be separated by fabric into three distinct groups: Granitic, Gabbroic, and Local, though only Gabbroic was recovered in this excavation coming from Trench 2.

Gabbroic

This fabric is hand made, relatively thin walled, sometimes wheel finished, often with a black coating on the exterior, and sometimes burnished. It is sometime coarse grained, containing a large quantity of white angular grits (feldspars) and other dark minerals such as amphibole and black tourmaline. Gabbroic fabric is found in vessels from the late Iron Age through to the Late Roman period and possibly continuing into the 5th and 6th centuries.

A single sherd was recovered, unfortunately it was too small and abraded to be very diagnostic.

The Post-Roman Period.

The largest collection of pottery some 32 sherds represents the major occupation period on the island: the post-Roman period, commencing in the 5th century and for Tintagel Castle continuing until about AD 500 (this is the conventional dating given for imported wares based on dating of sequences at Carthage [Fulford and Peacock 1984], however recent radio carbon dates obtained from excavations on the Lower Terrace, Site C have appeared to show these continuing into the late 6th century and possibly going on to the 7th century (Harry and Morris 1997). In this particular case all the material is of imported Mediterranean wares forming two main groups which are fine table wares and large storage jars or amphorae; though there is also a small group of table coarse wares or kitchenware represented.

Two groups of fine table wares are encountered at Tintagel; these are Phocian Red Slipped Ware (PRSW) and African Red Slipped Ware (ARSW). In this investigation only PRSW was encountered.

Phocean Red Slipped Ware PRSW (Hayes 1980).

Originating in Phoecea in western Turkey, the only form that seems to have been imported to Tintagel is a bowl, Hayes (1972) Form 3. A fine well sorted sandy fabric, often soft and friable, a pale pink to buff in colour. Decoration consists of a collared or straight edged rim (MPRG 1998) which is often embellished with rouletted designs. The base is sometimes decorated with a stamp, often cruciform in shape. The entire is covered in an even red slip.

2 co-joining sherds of PRSW were recovered (From Trench 1) forming the rimsherd of a Form 3 bowl. This form dates *circa* 475 to 550 AD. A further small scrap (identification is tentative) of PRSW came from the cliff area below the buttresses below the Great Hall investigated by abseiling where it was thought that an exposure of walling could be seen.

The bulk of the remaining sherds from imported sources forming some 93% are from large storage vessels or amphorae used in the transportation of various commodities including olive oil and wine. There are four different classes of these "B" ware amphorae (Peacock and Williams 1986) represented in the collection.

Class Bi Amphorae (Peacock and Williams Form 43).

A widespread form, production sites are known in the Argolid region of the Peloponnese, however other sites on the Greek mainland, Crete and the wine producing Greek islands may have produced similar forms. A globular shaped vessel with basal knob, short conical neck and high everted rim is characterised by combed ribbing often fairly deep in a band on the shoulder region; the fabric is fine grained, well sorted with white grains of limestone often visible, pink buff to orange brown in colour. Both graffiti and dipinti are known on vessel surfaces, perhaps traders or makers marks. Though a fairly long lived form, current from the early 5th century to the late 6th century the peak of its use and distribution was reached around the mid 5th to mid 6th centuries i.e. between 450 and 550 AD. A wine content has been suggested.

A total of 17 sherds some 51.5 % of the total assemblage were recovered.

Class Bii Amphorae (Peacock and Williams Form 44).

Known from several kiln sites to have originated from the coastal plain of Cilicia in southeast Turkey. An ovoid shape with rounded base, broad neck, and twisted asymmetric handles; the vessel is characterised by tegulated ribbing that covers the body. The fabric is hard, sandy and variable in colour from pinkish-cream to reddish-yellow. Examples with graffiti and dipinti are known. The form of Bii is that dating from about 450 AD to 600AD (Peacock and Williams 1986). The contents are uncertain, but the olive oil industry of the Antioch region may be involved.

A total of 7 sherds some 21.2% of the total were discovered all from Trench 1.

Class Biv Amphorae (Peacock and Williams Form 45).

These originate from Sardis in western Turkey. They are small carrot shaped vessels with tegulated ribbing on the body and a distinctive hard, highly micaceous fine fabric, red-brown in colour. The two handled form seen at Tintagel came into use by the middle of the 5th century AD and became rare after the middle of the 6th century. Contents are not known but wine or fine oils have been suggested.

Only a single sherd of this was found as a surface find from close to the spring on the Southern Terrace. This very thin walled vessel is probably under-represented due to the poor conditions for preservation.

Class Bv Amphorae (Thomas 1981).

These amphorae are still not provenanced, however they resemble Tunisian Africana Grande Peacock and Williams Class 34 from Byzacena. Large (up to 1.0m high) cylindrical in form with a pronounced foot spike and large handles. Characterised by thick-ridged walls the fabric is very sandy, pale buff-brown in colour. Residue analysis has shown these vessels to have carried olive oil.

5 sherds (15.1% of the total) were recovered again all from Trench 1.

All the above are of fabrics which have been identified and provenanced from sites throughout south-west Britain and elsewhere. However a further 4 sherds (12.1%) of Imported Courseware apparently originating from the same regions as these other well-known wares was also recovered. These coursewares have only recently been recognised by Thomas and Thorpe, although this work is still awaiting full publication. Forms include dishes and bowls (some with handles) and untyped amphora (Dark 2001). Three of the Imported Courseware fabrics have been identified in this assemblage, each is fully described as details are still unavailable elsewhere.

Fabric 1: Eastern Mediterranean Red Ware.

This is similar in form to North African Red Ware (Fulford and Peacock 1984) and is purple-red to reddish-orange in colour. It has a hard smooth texture, and is micaceous, with numerous well-rounded quartz grains. Some white limestone specks are present but not common. Forms include casseroles, storage jars, and jugs. Munsell: Light red 2.5YR 6/6 to Reddish Yellow 7.5YR 7/6.

2 sherds of this material were recovered though both were too small allow identification of the vessel form.

Fabric 19.

Brick red colour, soft, sandy texture. Numerous inclusions of well rounded quartz grains. Micaceous. Origin: Eastern Mediterranean? Munsell: Red 2.5YR 5/8.

One sherd in this fabric was recovered, a foot spike from a small type of carrot shaped amphora.

Fabric 21. Square Profiled Ridge Ware.

Pale pink to buff coloured. Hard smooth texture. Micaceous, with numerous quartz inclusions. Also distinct volcanic glass. Limestone fragments rare. This sectioned by D.P.S. Peacock 1967. Origin: Central or southern Anatolia, or the islands of Melos, Antiparos, or Gaili. Munsell: Pink 5YR 7/4 to a white 10YR 8/2.

One sherd of this material was recovered from Trench 1.

The Medieval period. (12th to 14th centuries AD).

This period of activity has left some artefactual evidence, 3 dateable objects (potsherds) being found within the scope of this project (it is possible that many of the objects that are undateable i.e. roofing slates and bones also date from this period).

The study of Cornish medieval pottery is still at an early stage, most published sites are rural and lack stratified sequences, their dating being in relation to broad regional traditions, close dating from a few rimsherds alone is not possible as coarseware forms can have a long duration, for example some rim forms from Exeter continued unchanged from the late 10th century to the early 14th century (Allan 1984). No pottery kilns have been excavated in Cornwall, however fabric analysis has been able to suggest (along with documentary evidence) areas where the pottery was most likely produced; two well documented production centres are known, *Lostwithiel* in the Fowey valley, and *St Germans* in the Tamar valley, while fabric analysis has identified a type of pottery which is distinct from these, named *Bunnings Park / Stuffle Ware* after the site where it was first recognised, though it is thought that it too may have been manufactured in the *Lostwithiel* area.

Two medieval pottery fabrics have been identified in the current collection, all coming from Trench 1.

Cornish Medieval Coarsewares.

Hand made, thin walled vessels, with a micaceous fabric, often with rounded quartz inclusions, sometimes with other crushed rock filler (i.e. slate), sometimes wheel finished and hard fired. Vessels represented are mostly cooking pots (undecorated) or occasionally jugs, the centre of production is not known, but most probably based on an area where granitic clays are easily obtainable. They are long lived forms, unchanging practical designs, from the late 12th century, to the end of the 14th century.

2 body sherds of this material was recovered, however they were not diagnostic.

Cornish Medieval Coarseware, Bunnings Park / Stuffle Ware.

This pottery is hand made, often wheel finished, thin walled, micaceous fabric with common inclusions of rounded quartz grains, hard fired with a pink-buff exterior and a grey core. This ware was probably fabricated in the *Lostwithiel* area, though actual kiln sites are not known (it is possible that they were clamp fired without purpose built kilns). Dating from the 13th and 14th centuries, forms include cooking pots, and jugs; bowls and rare cisterns coming into use at the end of the 14th, start of the 15th centuries, all with sagging bases. Decoration of feint incised lines, applied thumbed strips, and stabbed handles is infrequent (O'Mahoney 1989 a/b and 1994).

A single rimsherd from a cooking vessel has been recognised in this collection, the form suggesting a date of *circa* 1250AD (O'Mahoney, C. 1989 a).

Discussion.

Trench 1.

This trench across the cliff fall scar face was excavated to a layer of crushed shillet which appeared to be the natural bedrock.

The earliest phase was context [102]. This layer was immediately above the natural shillet and appeared to be limited on the island side and also retained by a linear shaped, low slate foundation that was possibly the revetting wall for the lower Post-Roman terrace or perhaps a building situated upon it. This layer produced 20 sherds all of which were post-Roman 5th/ 6th century imported ware including Bi amphora, Bii amphora, Bv amphora, PRSW, and imported coarse wares. The PRSW included the rimsherd of a Form 3 bowl dating from *circa* 475 to 550 AD.

Context [101] a mixture of shillet and clay, that overlay context [102] and the possible wall foundation. This probably represents the clearing and levelling of the Post-Roman terrace prior to castle construction. This produced a single sherd of a Cornish Medieval Coarseware, Bunnings Park / Stuffle Ware cooking vessel dating from the 13th century AD suggesting that this was when this activity occurred.

The topsoil that was removed prior to the excavation and the general cleaning of the cliff fall scar produced a mixture of Medieval and Post-Roman material. It is obvious that the levelling of the terrace and construction of the castle during the medieval period included post-Roman material within its make up. It is most likely that all this material was derived from occupation material on the terraces above within the Inner Ward (see Thomas 1993, p 122).

Trench 2.

This trench was excavated in the south east corner of one of the clearly defined rectangular earthwork structures that had been identified by the RCHME survey of 1985 on the Southern Terrace. The excavation at this location did indeed reveal that the earthwork represented the remains of a substantial stone built building, one corner being exposed in the excavation. The trench was not bottomed on the interior of the building due to time constraints and fading light, the excavation being stopped at a level identified as the lower of two compacted clay floors. The trench on the exterior of the building beyond the clearly defined southern (seaward) wall, was taken down to the natural consisting of a yellow-brown clay / shillet.

No artefacts were recovered from the lowest deposits within the building, though charcoal and very degraded bone was noticed mixed with the compacted clay forming the floor surfaces.

From the material infilling the building, context [201] which resembled wall demolition material (slate and shillet blocks mixed with clay loam) two sherds of Bi amphora, and a small sherd of Romano-British Gabbroic ware was recovered. There was no Medieval material.

The artefactual evidence from this site seems to suggest that this building was probably constructed and abandoned during the Post-roman phase of occupation on Tintagel Island.

Two further Post-Roman sherds were found as surface finds in burrows on the Southern Terrace.

Conclusions and observations.

Trench 1.

This trench was situated across the scar of a cliff fall that had occurred in 1918 that had apparently become re-activated in recent times creating a new slippage face that exposed deposits that lay below the Great Hall within the Inner Ward of the castle. The 1918 cliff fall had deposited pottery on the beach which was fortunately collected at the time. These artefacts were examined in 1988 (Thomas and Thorpe 1988) and found to consist of mostly Post-Roman material (some 52 sherds) indicating that the deposits disturbed by the fall mostly dated from the 5th or 6th centuries AD. It was initially believed that this was mostly derived from midden material. It was hoped that the “Extreme Archaeology” trench could help to determine the nature of the deposits at this point and to see what was revealed by the slip scar face.

As described above, the trench revealed what appeared to be the lowest foundation courses of a turf wall running roughly north-west to south-east. From the material retrieved it can be shown that this structure dates from the Post-Roman period *circa* 550 AD. This is of great significance. In 1988, fieldwork examining (at a distance using binoculars) the south-east cliff face immediately below the Great Hall within the Inner Ward Island by Professor Charles Thomas and the author identified the existence of artificial terraces with surviving upstanding structures. It was believed at the time that these structures dated from the Post-Roman period (Thomas 1993).

The 1918 cliff fall scar appeared to be at the level of the lowest terrace identified in 1988 so it was hoped that the work of “Extreme Archaeology” would help to confirm this. This seems to have been successfully achieved with the identification of a Post-roman structure and Terrace at the level predicted by the previous work.

Trench 2.

As described above this trench was located on the Southern Terrace within the corner of a rectangular earthwork that had been clearly located by the RCHME survey of 1985. Prior to this survey, no remains thing had been recognised on this terrace. The RCHME survey identified *circa* 15 buildings or platforms, most being concentrated at the eastern end of the Southern Terrace. Having been identified, various interpretations of what these structures could be were put forward, the general consensus being that these well preserved buildings (with some walls still standing to up to 1.5m high) were probably the workmen’s quarters erected to house the people building the 13th century castle (Thomas 1993. p 75).

It was hoped that the “Extreme Archaeology” excavation could provide an insight into the archaeological potential of these structures, for example, their state of preservation, the depth of archaeological deposits covering and within them, and most importantly evidence for their date.

In the event the excavation revealed the corner of a rectangular shaped structure with several courses of walling still surviving to a height of at least 0.40m and with at least two packed clay floors. Charcoal evidence suggested that the structure contained a hearth (though not revealed in the excavation). Though no direct evidence was obtained from these features the subsequent demolition layer contained Post-Roman material. There was no evidence for any medieval activity, so it is most likely that this structure was of Post-Roman date. This was reinforced by the evidence of the surface finds from the rest of the terrace and suggests that some, if not all the structures shown by the RCHME survey are Post-Roman in date.

The Romano-British sherd also found on this site hints at the possibility of some earlier activity on the Southern Terrace. The sherd is however very abraded in nature which strongly suggests that it

had been redeposited within the demolition layer after it had been lying around in the soil for sometime. An alternative is that it is actually contemporary with the Post-Roman imports, it being known from previous excavations that use of Romano-British wares continued into the 5th and possibly 6th centuries (Thorpe in Harry and Morris 1997).

At Tintagel the fragmentary remains of well over 100 amphorae of all types, a similar number of fine table ware, and numerous Courseware vessels have been recovered in excavations since the 1930's. This almost certainly indicates a trade involving more than one voyage in the period 500 to 600AD. Each shipment was probably heterogeneous in character, with cargo being picked up at more than one port in the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa. It is clear that the amphorae were imported for their contents, most probably olive oil and wine.

The trade would not of course have been one way but it is uncertain what would have been exchanged, though tin is the most likely candidate. The fact that Tintagel was at the end of this complex trade route suggests that the occupants wielded tremendous influence during the 5th and 6th centuries AD. Current thinking is that it was a high status royal citadel, a centre for tribute gathering, distribution and trade.

The nature of the Romano-British settlement has been discussed elsewhere (Thorpe in Harry and Morris 1997) but it probably was the precursor to the post-Roman citadel and entrepot. The single sherd that can be possibly attributed to this period can be shown to be redeposited so it is most likely that the area investigated was not occupied at this time.

The extraordinary nature of the Post-Roman occupation of Tintagel has been further emphasised by the work of "Extreme Archaeology". It has demonstrated the great extent and density to which Post-Roman occupation took advantage of all available land surfaces, with structural elements and sherds of Mediterranean imported ware being found in every area examined. "Extreme Archaeology" has provided a valuable insight into the archaeological potential of previously inaccessible areas of the site, thus aiding in the understanding of the remarkable site that is Tintagel.

Acknowledgements.

Many thanks are due to Professor Charles Thomas whose input, support and encouragement greatly enriched the content of this report.

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