



## Notes

**A Second Roman Fort is Confirmed in Cornwall.** Steve Hartgroves and John Smith write: Archaeologists working for the Historic Environment Service (HES) of Cornwall County Council have confirmed that a square earthwork sited on a promontory overlooking the River Fowey not far from Restormel Castle is a Roman fort (FIG. 1). This is only the second Roman fort confirmed in the county and the discovery will have major implications for interpretations of the period.



FIG. 1. The square earthwork seen from the air in 1989 (CAU/ABP/F19/108).  
(Photo: Steve Hartgroves, Historic Environment Service, Cornwall County Council)

Interest in the site was recently rekindled as a result of fieldwork carried out by Jonathan Clemes of St Austell; his finds joined an assemblage of material recovered over several years, which includes imported samian pottery, Roman coins, fragments of stone querns, glassware, gaming counters, and slag from iron smelting.

The Duchy of Cornwall provided funding for an assessment of the finds assemblage which was carried out by Carl Thorpe of the HES. This revealed that, when compared to other excavated sites of the Iron Age and Romano-British periods in Cornwall, the site has produced an unusual quantity of 'exotic' material imported from the Continent and areas bordering the Mediterranean. In 'native' sites the imported wares account for less than 25 per cent of the total, whereas at Restormel the exotic material accounts for over 75 per cent. The only comparable site is the Roman fort at Nanstallon, west of Bodmin, excavated in the 1960s by Aileen Fox and William Ravenhill.

The possibility that the earthwork was a Roman fort is not a new idea, but it had been classified as a native defended settlement when it was scheduled in 1973. Since that time several episodes of

fieldwalking have dramatically increased the quantity of finds and the preponderance of exotic material has become more apparent. In order to test the hypothesis, a geophysical survey was carried out by Peter Nicholas and a team of volunteers from Tamarside Archaeology Group (based in the Saltash Heritage Centre).

The magnetometer survey has now provided conclusive evidence that the earthwork is indeed a Roman fort (FIG. 2). The survey shows that the site comprises two sets of banks (and ditches) surrounding a rampart which defines an internal area approximately 60 by 70 m, with opposed entrances in at least three sides. This is closely comparable to the Roman fort at Nanstallon; they are similar in shape and size, and in the arrangement of their entrances, but the Nanstallon fort had only a single-ditched rampart. Also, excavations showed that occupation at Nanstallon was relatively short-lived, lasting perhaps for a decade or two in the latter part of the first century A.D., whereas the finds assemblage indicates that the fort at Restormel was occupied continuously, or perhaps repeatedly, from the first to the early fourth centuries A.D.

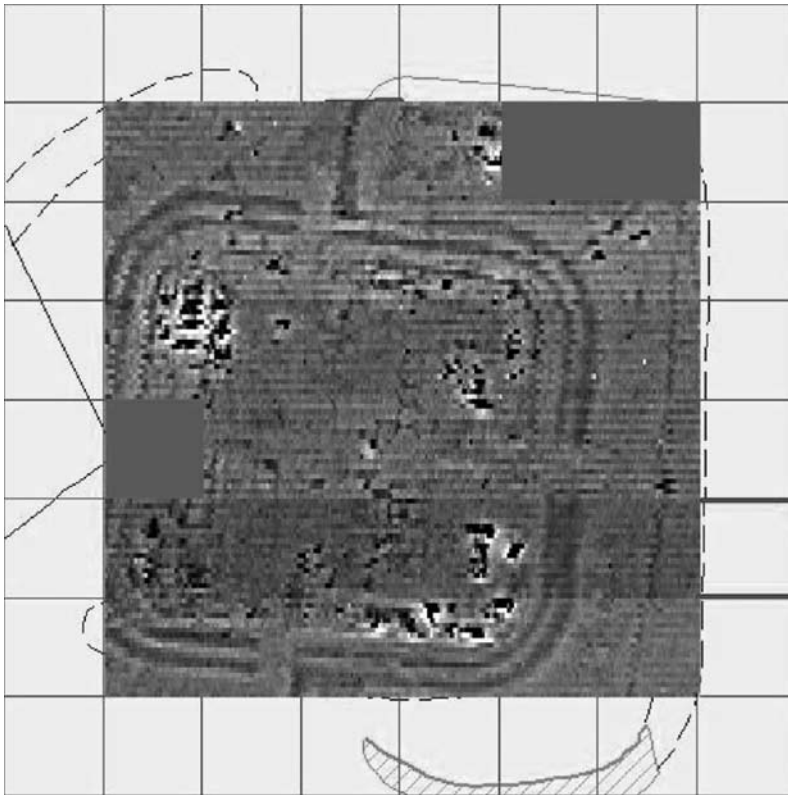


FIG. 2. The results of the magnetometer survey.  
(Tamarside Archaeology Group)

At Nanstallon, excavations revealed evidence for the *principia* and *praetorium*, barrack blocks, workshops and stables. The magnetometer survey at Restormel produced faint traces of structures in the interior and three areas of high readings which are thought to indicate burning (ovens or furnaces).

With two forts now recorded, it becomes feasible to speculate about their wider geo-political context. Both forts are sited on hilltops overlooking the highest navigable point of a major river — Nanstallon

overlooks the River Camel which flows north into the Bristol Channel at Padstow, and Restormel overlooks the River Fowey which flows south into the English Channel at Fowey. It is possible that these sites were reached and supplied predominantly by ships sailing (or rowing) along the coast rather than overland, which would mean negotiating the inhospitable uplands of Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor. However, a number of forts and marching camps which have been recognised in Devon (at Okehampton for example) indicate that soldiers of the Second Augustan legion were also extending their influence overland westwards from their base at Exeter (*Isca Dumnoniorum*) in the first century. The all-important Tamar crossing, though, has yet to be located.

The two forts are separated by a ridge which forms the central spine of Cornwall, along which a prehistoric ridgeway is thought to have run, but a short distance of only 5 miles (9 km) separates the two. They are strategically sited on either side of this watershed and would have been able to 'oversee' traffic moving east–west along the ridgeway and north–south along the two river systems. It is worth noting that Castle Canyke, one of the county's largest Iron Age hillforts, sits astride this ridge overlooking the present A30 (Bodmin Bypass).

The discovery of the new fort has also highlighted another aspect of the Roman period in Cornwall which has long occupied local archaeologists, even more so since the designation of the Cornish Mining World Heritage Site. The discovery of iron slag among the finds assemblage at Restormel suggests that iron smelting was being carried out in the immediate vicinity of the fort. At the moment there is no direct link between the fort and the slag, and they may be separated in time by many centuries. However, it may be no coincidence that Restormel fort is located just 300 m from a prominent iron lode, known to have been exploited in the post-medieval period. Nanstallon fort is located within 2 miles of deposits of silver, lead, tin and copper, and crucible fragments and a single drop of silver-rich slag found during the excavations seem to indicate that the Roman military were prospecting for workable deposits of minerals in this locality. The presence of an iron lode 1 mile to the west of Nanstallon fort now takes on an added significance.

Further fieldwork is planned. We hope to be able to return to the site to extend the area covered by the magnetometer survey, and to carry out a resistivity survey to clarify the internal layout of the fort. A survey of the iron lode is also planned, and it is hoped that we might be able to associate the fort with the ironworking. Documentary research is also required to investigate the history of iron mining in the area.

Since the writing of this paper, a third Roman fort has been discovered in Cornwall, at Calstock in the Tamar Valley. A geophysical survey by Chris Smart, of the Department of Archaeology at the University of Exeter, revealed what appeared to be a double-ditched fort of approximately 1.8 ha, and this has been confirmed through excavations carried out in January 2008. A note is planned for the following edition of *Britannia*.

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