

# New Excavations at Tintagel Castle, Cornwall: Tintagel Castle Archaeological Research Project 2016–2025

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*Down through the ages Tintagel Castle's historical association with the legendary King Arthur has generated national and global interest. In modern times thousands of visitors seek out this magnificent historic place on a remote Cornish headland. The stone buildings of medieval Tintagel Castle built by Earl Richard of Cornwall around the 1230s comprise a striking set of historic ruins on Tintagel headland on the north Cornish coast. Yet this major coastal citadel also hosts remains of earlier settlement dating to the fifth and sixth centuries AD.*

*Results from new excavations, Tintagel Castle Archaeological Research Project in 2016 and 2017, have enhanced knowledge about the special social and economic character of its major post-Roman settlement. Detailed investigation of buildings on the southern terrace was accompanied by a major new scientific dating programme. Three major phases were recorded: occupation in the late fifth to early sixth centuries cal AD, the late eighth to ninth centuries, and, for the first time, the mid-eleventh to twelfth centuries AD. Tintagel's resident community in post-Roman times was connected with places across south-west Britain as well as communities located along the western Atlantic seaboard with links to the eastern Mediterranean. This was a major elite settlement in the ancient kingdom of Dumnonia.*

*New light has also been shone on settlement at Tintagel in the early medieval and immediate pre-Conquest period, before the construction of Earl Richard's castle. The complexities which underpinned interregional and wider intercontinental networks and Tintagel's lingering historical significance have been vividly captured in the archaeological record. This research project, the first in over 30 years, has provided major new insights: a new archaeology and deeper understanding of the evolving history of settlement at Tintagel has been gained.*

Tintagel Castle, located on the north Cornish coast (SX 04988925; Fig 1), was taken into state guardianship in 1929; it is still owned by the Duchy of Cornwall. It was designated as a scheduled monument in 1981 – ‘*Romano-British and early medieval settlement, medieval church, castle and associated features on Tintagel Island and adjoining mainland*’ (National Heritage List for England (NHLE) 1014793.)

Archaeological excavations at Tintagel Castle in the 1930s, and then 60 years later in the 1990s, established that a major settlement of fifth- and sixth-century date had once existed on this remote headland (Radford 1935; Thomas 1993; Barrowman *et al*, 2007; Nowakowski 2018). Discoveries of late Roman imported pottery – amphorae (handled storage vessels), fine (dining) tableware and imported glassware – revealed a significant history.

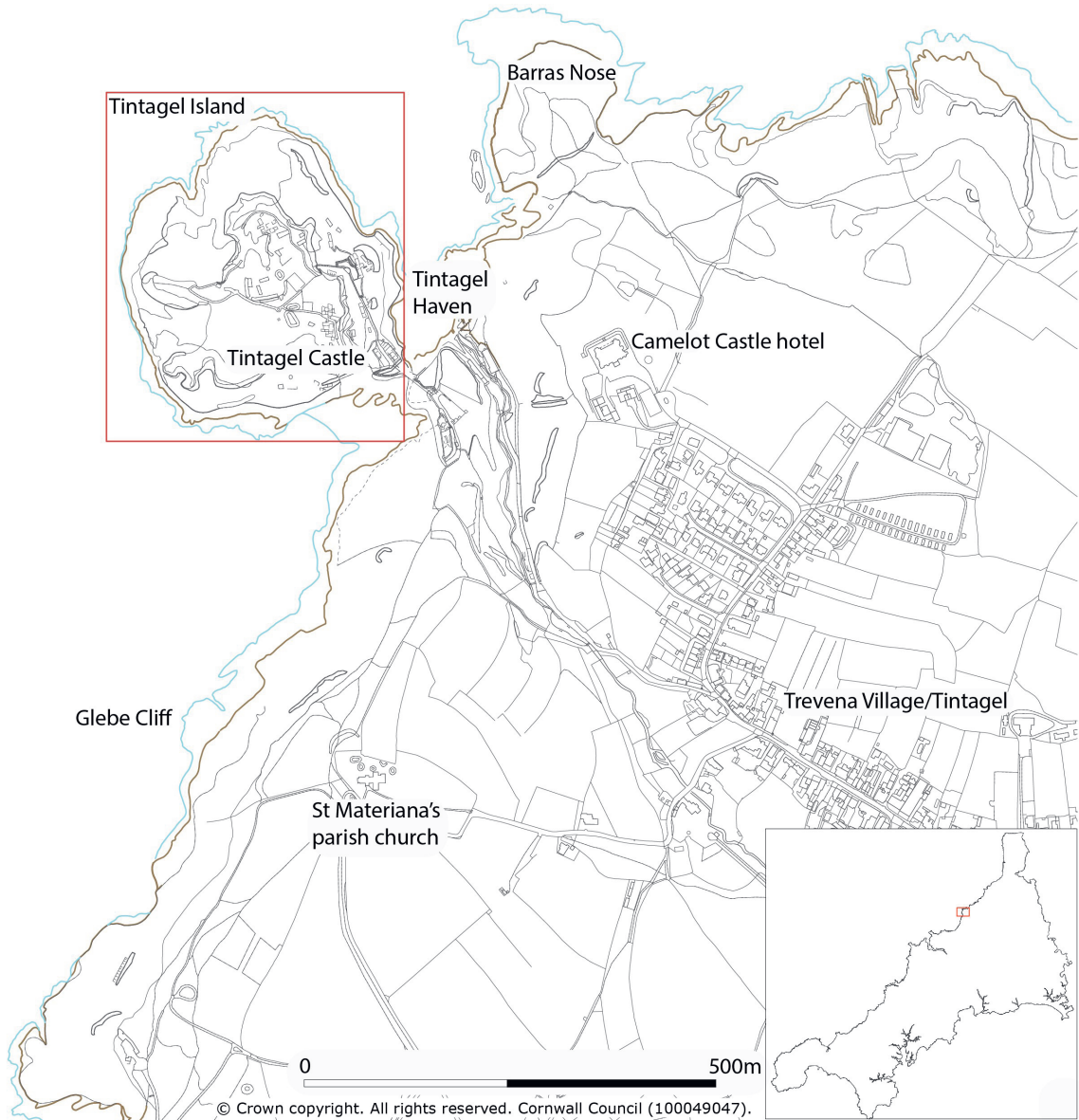


Fig 1 Location figure. (Nowakowski and Gossip, 2026, fig 1.1, © J Gossip.)

Its post-Roman community was in contact with communities located around the Mediterranean basin and at other places along the western Atlantic seaboard (cf Thomas 1981; 1993; Duggan 2018). In the twenty-first century these discoveries have confirmed Tintagel's unique place in post-Roman and early medieval settlement in Insular Britain.

The Tintagel Castle Archaeological Research Project (TCARP) comprised the first major

research excavations to have taken place at this significant historic site for over 30 years (Fig 2). The project, commissioned by English Heritage, was delivered by the Cornwall Archaeological Unit (CAU) with post-excavation support from Historic England from 2016 to 2025. The primary aim was to enhance knowledge about the social and economic characters of the fifth to sixth century settlement on the headland.



*Fig 2 Aerial view of Tintagel headland. (©HER, Cornwall Council F77-043.)*

The full results on all phases will be published in a major new monograph (Nowakowski and Gossip 2026). The focus of this synthesis is new information on settlement dating to the fifth and sixth centuries AD: that is, phase 1 (see below). Outline reporting on other phases and preliminary consideration of the implications of a new site chronology, together with commentary on the complex archaeology at Tintagel are summarised here.

## Background of archaeological enquiry and scope of the TCARP excavations

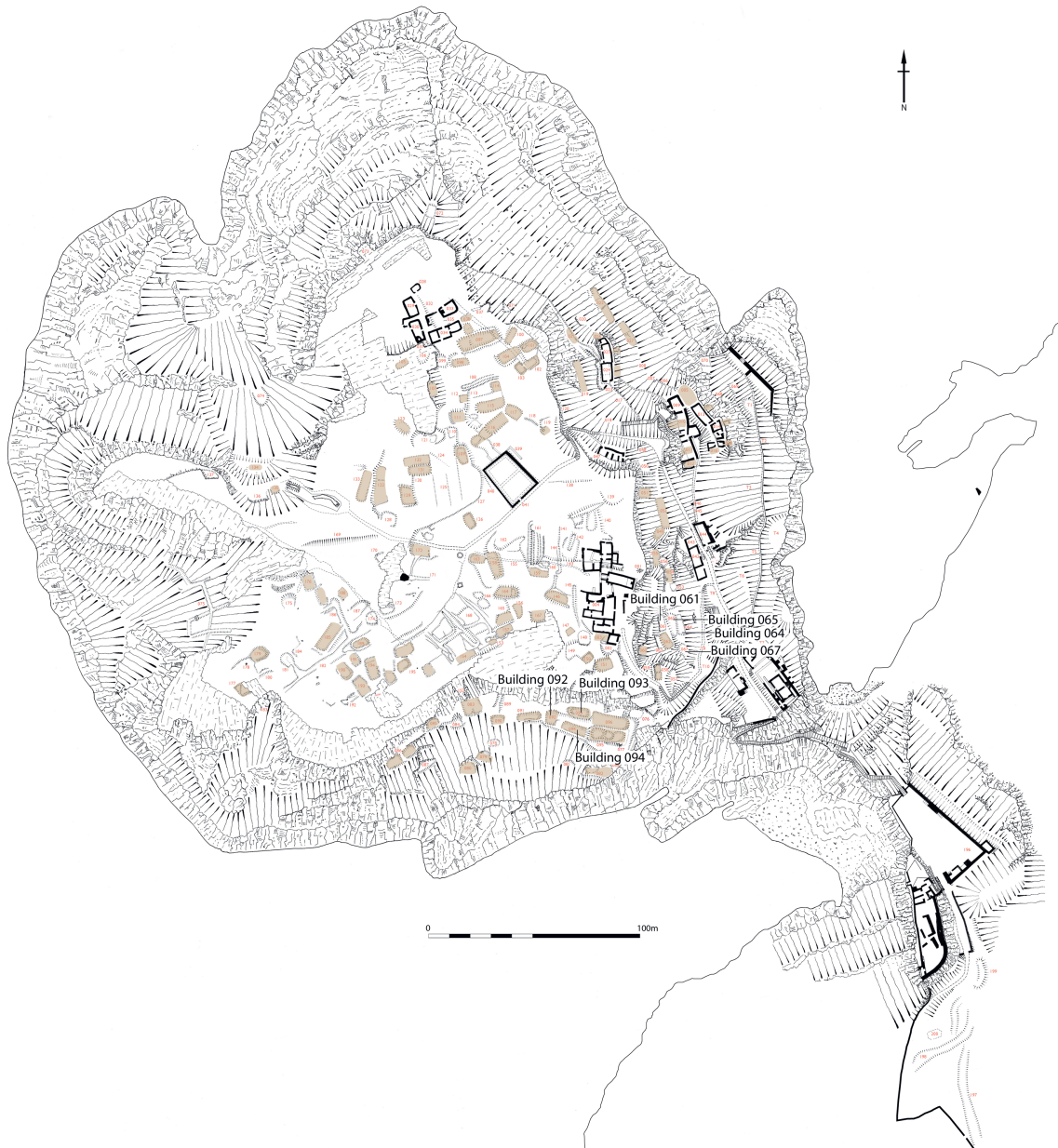
Archaeological excavations on Tintagel headland by Glasgow University in the 1990s were mainly focused on the re-examination of Site C – a terrace located on the eastern side of the headland. Site C had first been investigated during C A Raleigh Radford's pioneering fieldwork at Tintagel in the 1930s (Barrowman *et al* 2007). Radford's archaeological campaign involved excavation as the first step in the restoration of clusters of visible stone ruins on the headland (Radford 1935). He suggested that parts of the castle had been built by Earl Reginald in the 1140s, but this is now considered unlikely (Radford 1937; Padel 1988).

While work in the 1930s had essentially been a conservation project, startling new discoveries were made, not least hard evidence for wider intercontinental connectivity with discovery of late Roman imported pottery, a first for Britain (*cf*

Duggan 2018; Nowakowski 2018). In the 1990s the team from Glasgow discovered intact stratigraphy amenable to scientific (radiocarbon) dating as well as potential structural evidence for buildings of post-Roman date.

The overriding strategy for TCARP was to build upon past knowledge and to explore new areas on the headland.

TCARP's focus was on the examination of new earthworks which had been identified following a fire on the headland in 1984. At that time, the outlines of many rectangular and sub-rectangular earthworks, interpreted as buried stone buildings, were revealed as the thin topsoil across the summit of the headland was heavily scorched by a wildfire. Measured ground survey in 1985 resulted in a radical new plan of dense (sub-surface) earthworks and historic ruins across the entire headland (Thomas and Fowler 1985). This survey was revisited in 2015 to inform the design of TCARP (Bowden and Jamieson 2016). Between 60 and 80 new structures were identified, with an overall estimate of up to 120 earthworks interpreted as 'buildings' across 6 ha (Bowden 2026, fig 1.24). The upstanding stone ruins, which in Radford's time had been regarded as random clusters of buildings, were suddenly part of a much bigger network of buildings, terraces and enclosures. The headland hosts the largest complex of intact ruins dating to the post-Roman and early medieval period at one place in south-west Britain. The plan of settlement at Tintagel in terms of setting, extent, size and scale is unmatched: it is exceptional (Nowakowski and Gossip 2026).



*Fig 3 Survey map showing new earthworks as well as locations of TCARP trenches on upper eastern terrace and southern terrace. (Nowakowski and Gossip, 2026, fig 1.24.)*

### TCARP: new discoveries evaluated with exceptional preservation

The TCARP excavations focused on two new locations: the upper eastern terrace and the

southern terrace where earthworks were initially evaluated by geophysical surveys and trial excavations. In 2016 buried stone walls and well-preserved stratigraphy were discovered (in slot trenches) in both locations (Fig 4). Open area excavation took place on the southern terrace the



*Fig 4 Looking across excavations in progress on upper eastern terrace. (© J Nowakowski 2016.)*

following year (see below). Excavation strategies were determined by conditions of Scheduled Monument Consent (Nowakowski and Gossip 2017). No walls were sectioned or removed, and on completion of fieldwork all were reburied intact under a protective geotextile cover (Nowakowski and Gossip 2019). The main objective was to test preliminary interpretations based on survey data, recover primary data for scientific (radiocarbon) dating and carry out targeted sampling for archaeobotanical data. Intact middens recorded on the southern terrace in 2017 were sampled by sondages and then reburied. They remain *in situ* for future research.

#### **Post-Roman and early medieval buildings on the upper eastern terrace**

In 2016 a segment of an intact drystone wall of one rectangular stone building (064) was revealed in one of the two slot trenches, trench Tristan, which had been opened up on the upper eastern terrace (Fig 5). Imported Late Roman pottery, splinters of imported glassware, iron objects and worked stone were found in overburden layers and occupation layers. These layers were sampled and not fully excavated. A sizeable quantity of charred cereal grains comprising barley, naked wheat, oats and rye was sampled from an occupation surface. Their survival in such bulk on the headland is entirely new for Tintagel (Scantlebury 2026). The remains of a stone pathway (306), provisionally interpreted during field survey as a building, were found in

the second trench, trench Isolde (Nowakowski and Gossip 2026, chapter 2, fig 2.12).

Two main phases of early historic settlement were identified on the upper eastern terrace: the earliest horizon of post-Roman date, fifth and sixth centuries AD, and the latest, assigned to the Saxo-Norman period, in the eleventh to twelfth centuries AD. Both were represented by buildings which had been built upon an artificial terrace. The construction of the stone pathway could have occurred in the post-Roman period. There was no definitive evidence to confirm that the upper eastern terrace was in active use during the thirteenth century (when the medieval castle was built), but physical access to this area, via the pathway (306) found in trench Isolde, does suggest it was at least open and potentially accessible. The buildings, and pathway, were probably abandoned when the medieval castle was built in the thirteenth century, when the principal focus was the area known today as the Inner Ward. The upper eastern terrace has clear potential for future archaeological investigation (Nowakowski and Gossip 2026).

#### **The southern terrace: overall results in outline**

Drystone walls of three large stone rectangular buildings: 092, 093 and 094 (part of a larger suite of six), were revealed in plan on the southern terrace in 2017. Sections of walls had been exposed in slot trenches in 2016 (trenches Geraint



Fig 5 TCARP16 Trench Tristan: phase 3 revetment wall during excavation in progress. (© J Nowakowski 2016.)

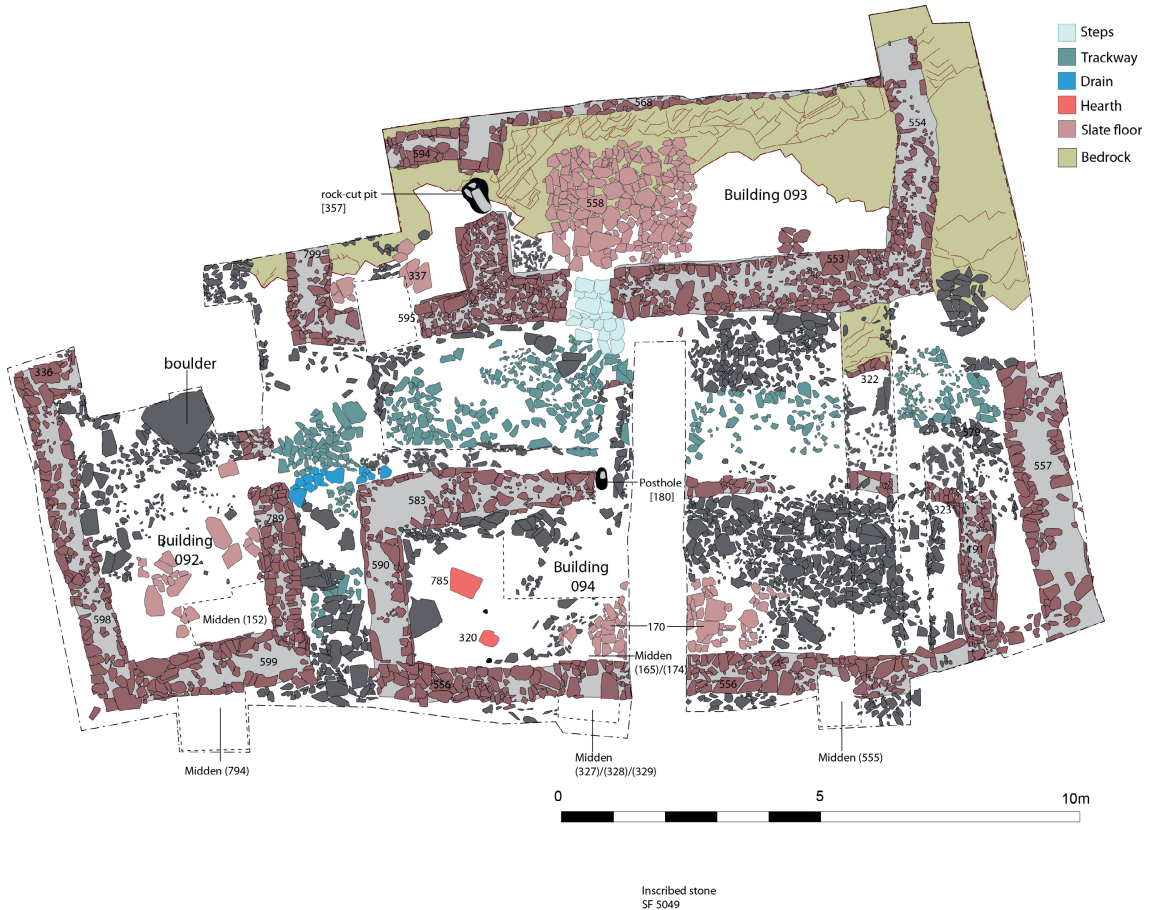


Fig 6 TCARP17 Overall excavation plan of buildings excavated on the southern terrace. North is to the top of the plan. (© J Gossip from Nowakowski and Gossip, 2026.)

and Mark) (Nowakowski and Gossip 2017). The eventual area of the southern terrace examined during TCARP was 290 sq m: an estimated 350–400 cubic metres of soil, slate rubble and stone were removed by hand during the 2017 excavation. Preservation was exceptional: walls of stone buildings (standing to knee height) were uncovered as well as internal floors, hearths, doorways, an annex, passageways and an external flight of stone steps (Fig 6).

Rectangular drystone building 093, 11m long by 5m wide, lay on the upper part of the terrace: aligned west-east it had been built right up against the foot of a quarried cliff-face. The rectangular earthwork interpreted as ‘building’ 094, 12m long by 4.5m wide, was also aligned west-east and occupied the lower terrace. Square building 092, 7m long by 6m wide, lay on the western side of the complex, was aligned north-south, and spanned the width of the terrace (Fig 7). Alongside exposure of the ground plans of these drystone structures, middens, as well as evidence for occupation activities such as open hearths and floor surfaces, were also found. The buried archaeology on the southern terrace was exceptional.

A major scientific dating (radiocarbon) programme, along with diagnostic artefacts, revealed four major phases of settlement activity on the southern terrace. Phase 1 dated to the late fifth and early sixth centuries AD (building 191, primary middens, ‘building’ 094, walls (720), (322), and (568)). Phase 2 marked activity during the eighth to ninth centuries AD (re-worked midden (152) and others). Phase 3 dated to the eleventh

to twelfth centuries when two stone buildings 093 and 092 built upon made ground and earlier ruins transformed the character of the terrace (Bayliss 2026). The southern terrace was abandoned: the roofless buildings collapsed due to dereliction (phase 4).

Two of the buildings, 093 and 092, were contemporary, assigned to phase 3 (see below). The third ‘building’ (earthwork) 094 proved to be a sub-rectangular arrangement of walls of different periods rather than a coherent single-roofed structure. The walls of ‘building’ 094 had been built upon, and had accommodated, walls of an earlier stone building (191) (phase 1, see below). All the stone structures had been built upon a major artificial terrace. This lay within the shadow of a high vertical quarried cliff-face: the source of building stone. The walls of these three major structures were coursed drystone masonry bonded by a clean clay. All the stone structures lay buried beneath thick layers of overburden (soil and collapsed building stone) subsequently concealed by thick maritime sward.

The southern terrace had been artificially constructed. A wide and stepped platform was made: its upper part had been cut back into natural sloping bedrock. The middle and lower parts of this terrace comprised made ground: here multiple dumps of primary and secondary (re-worked) middens had been dumped laterally across the entire area (during phases 1 and 2, see below). The difference in height from the upper terrace to the lower was just over 3m.



*Fig 7 Looking down upon the southern terrace during excavation on 10 August 2017. (© J Nowakowski 2017.)*

*Phase 1: post-Roman occupation on the southern terrace*

The earliest, phase 1, comprised stone buildings and the dumping of organic waste, as well as artefacts, from food consumption events (see below). Primary midden deposits were recorded on the edge of the southern terrace. These middens were sampled in sondages and the organic material extracted has provided a secure and accurately dated sequence using radiocarbon (AMS measurements) (Bayliss *et al* 2026).

Bayesian modelling of a series of radiocarbon dates indicated that during phase 1 the primary middens (located on the lower zone of the southern terrace) were deposited rapidly from the late fifth to second quarter of the sixth centuries AD. Post-Roman occupation on the southern terrace dates within the timespan cal AD 470–490 and cal AD 525–550 (Bayliss *et al* 2026, fig 4.2). These are the earliest scientifically-dated layers recorded during TCARP. Overall post-Roman occupation on the southern terrace may have lasted for a period of 1–20 years (95 per cent probability). In other words, the dating evidence suggests that there was a short but intense burst of occupation here in the late fifth or the early sixth century (Bayliss *et al* 2026).

The intact standing end wall of a drystone building, 191, with coursed dry-bonded masonry and orthostatic walling was also found on the

lower part of the terrace. This building had a very distinctive masonry style (Fig 8; Nowakowski 2022). Radiocarbon dating of the floor (192)/(324) confirmed a post-Roman date: the earliest intact walling of a building of this period found on the headland to date. Its full extent was not exposed but the building was at least 5m wide and may have been up to 15m long (see below). It contained an (open) slate hearth [320] and had an earthen floor (192)/(324). There may have been other stone buildings during phase 1 on the terrace: poorly preserved remnants of stone walls, 720, on the upper part of the terrace, and walls 322 and 568, hint at other contemporary buildings. These were swept away 600 years later during phase 3.

The principal character of settlement during phase 1 on the southern terrace was activities located within stone buildings as well as the disposal of food waste and rubbish – middening. This is a major discovery. Ceramic analysis combined with scientific dating has identified these activities as late fifth and/or early sixth century in date (Bayliss *et al* 2026; Duggan 2026). Earlier occupation layers were provisionally identified, perhaps dating to the late fourth century AD, but this requires future testing (Nowakowski and Gossip 2026, chapter 3).

All the middens contained a wealth of finds: late prehistoric pottery (Iron Age and late Roman), Late Roman imported pottery (amphorae, fine tableware,



*Fig 8 TCARP17 Building 191 during excavation on the southern terrace on 10 August 2017. (© J Nowakowski 2017.)*

coarse wares), imported glassware, fragments of copper alloy and iron objects, worked slate and stone items and white quartz pebbles (Duggan *et al* forthcoming; Quinnell *et al* 2026; Foster *et al* 2026; Quinnell and Nowakowski 2026). They also contained exceptionally well-preserved organic data: faunal remains (some articulated bone), some fish bone, marine mollusca, burnt seaweed, charred plant and cereal remains as well as wood charcoals (Campbell 2026; Hazell 2026; Baker 2026). The faunal data is interpreted as detritus from feasting events (see below).

#### *Literacy on the headland*

A surprising discovery was a large, quarried slate slab SF5049 upon which text had been incised. This slab been built into the layered masonry of a major drystone wall 556 (which ran along the edge of the southern terrace – the sea-facing wall of ‘building’ 094). On its upper face seven lines of text, framed within a cartouche, were discovered. The texts combined Latin and Brittonic personal names with a monogram using Greek letters. The hand-written text stylistically dates to the mid to late sixth and/or early seventh centuries AD (Fig 9). It represents a trial-piece where someone had practiced writing, probably with a metal stylus (Brown *et al* 2026). Its discovery confirms highly literate residents at Tintagel during the early medieval period. The slab had been reused as building material and probably had come from elsewhere on the headland. This exciting discovery is the second slate with (hand-

written) text now recorded at Tintagel. The *Coliavi* (*ARTOGNOV*) stone was found in the 1990s (Barrowman *et al* 2007, chapter 10).

#### *Phase 2: transformation of the southern terrace*

During phase 2 reworked midden dumps were dumped laterally across the middle terrace and formed the foundation for the construction of stone buildings 092 and 093, built 600 years later during phase 3 (see below). Fragments of at least four bar-lug vessels were found in middens assigned to phase 2: activities on the southern terrace are scientifically dated to the eighth to ninth centuries AD (cal AD 750–860) (Fig 10; Bayliss *et al* 2026). Although the exact character of occupation on the terrace at this time remains sketchy, the location witnessed a radical make-over: the stone walls of ‘building’ 094 continued to be visible and so the space may have functioned as an open courtyard. Earlier buildings which had perhaps once stood on the upper part of the terrace were swept away (see above). The foundation deposits – that is reworked middens – were laid down for buildings and pathways constructed during phase 3 (see below).

#### *Phase 3: Saxo-Norman times: pre-Conquest Tintagel – new building and ale-making enterprises*

A third major phase of activity on the southern terrace is represented by the construction of two stone buildings, 092 and 093, dating to the early

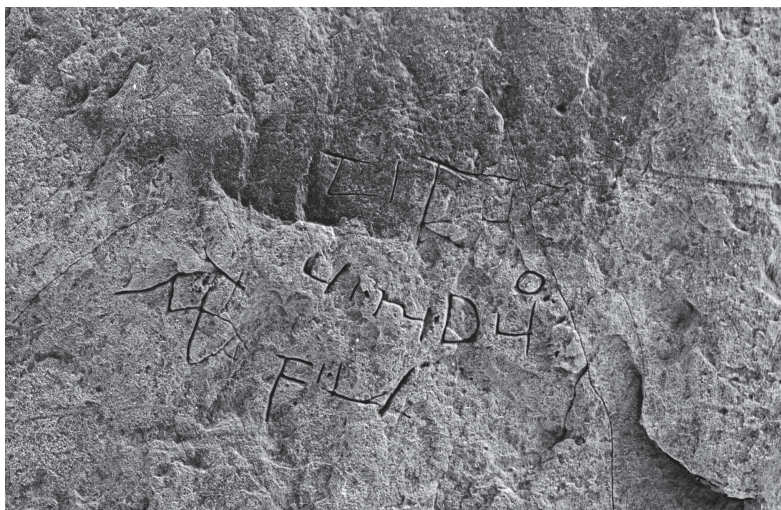


Fig 9 TCARP17 High resolution image of text on SF5049. (© T Goskar 2021.)



*Fig 10 TCARP17 Tracie Haslam and the bar-lug vessel in situ, August 2017. (© J Nowakowski 2017.)*

to mid-eleventh and twelfth centuries AD – cal AD 1050–1100/1150 (Bayliss *et al* 2026). These contemporary structures shared a passageway. As discussed, stone ruin ‘building’ 094, located on the lower part of the terrace and still visible at this time, may have served as an open courtyard. Radiocarbon dating has indicated that two roofed buildings, 092 and 093, were constructed before the Norman Conquest and used for several generations during the Saxo-Norman period. Analysis of archaeobotanical data associated with building 093 suggests that this may have been a malting house (Campbell 2026).

Radiocarbon dating has confirmed the occupation of the southern terrace on Tintagel headland in the immediate pre-Conquest period,

making the stone buildings discovered there at least 150 years earlier than the buildings assigned to Earl Richard’s thirteenth century castle. This is entirely new information about activities on the headland at about the time of the Domesday Book survey of 1086 (Holder and Padel 2026).

### Overall conclusions: enhanced understanding and wider significance

Over 700 years of activities were discovered on the southern terrace. Significantly these predate the construction of the buildings of the medieval

castle built by Earl Richard of Cornwall *c* 1230s. The creation of artificial terraces upon which to build stone buildings is clearly a major part of Tintagel's evolving story: the episodic history of reuse and rebuilding documented on the southern terrace (and the upper eastern terrace) during TCARP is not exceptional. The upstanding buildings of the medieval castle in the Inner Ward, for example, stand upon made ground which in turn had buried an earlier terrace which had hosted earlier buildings of the post-Roman period (Thomas 1988a; Nowakowski and Gossip 2026). Archaeological fieldwork over the past 80 years has therefore shown that the reuse of terraces was probably routine, and so many of the upstanding (and buried) stone buildings on Tintagel headland potentially have long and complex histories. These insights are very revealing about the enduring historical significance of this place and demonstrated that the arrangement and spatial distribution of buildings on Tintagel headland were not constrained by a challenging natural topography. The terraces represented significant investment which transformed this craggy coastal landmark into a major historical settlement with a long history.

Significantly these results have shed light on gaps in our knowledge about settlement on the headland during the early medieval period and beginning of later medieval period, that is from the fifth to twelfth centuries AD. Previously, little substantive information was known about Tintagel's history (and status) for this period (Thomas 1993; Barrowman *et al* 2007). The TCARP excavations have demonstrated that buried and upstanding archaeology across the entire headland is clearly complex: many upstanding stone ruins are likely to be fragments of structures associated with different historical periods. In addition, TCARP has demonstrated the high archaeological potential of the artificial terraces to contain intact stratigraphy and abundant artefacts in association with early structures. These major insights have clear implications for current interpretations as well as future study of the upstanding structures on the headland, many of which saw partial restoration during Radford's 1930s campaign (Nowakowski and Gossip 2026).

As discussed, this synthesis presents major insights and new information on the post-Roman settlement. Fuller details and discussion of activities in phases 2–4 are presented in the TCARP monograph (Nowakowski and Gossip 2026).

### **Phase 1: Economic and husbandry strategies at post-Roman Tintagel**

The excellent survival of faunal and macro-plant remains found in the middens on the southern terrace during TCARP are exceptional for Cornwall: new insights on specific economic husbandry practices for the post-Roman settlement have emerged for phase 1. Bones of whole carcasses of young pigs and cattle, alongside horse, and sheep/goat, were sampled from the middens. Some displayed butchery marks. Bone analyses indicate rapidly discarded food waste from feasting events. The animals were probably supplied from contemporary farms located in the wider hinterland of Tintagel as food render and tribute (Baker 2026).

During phase 1 cereals were also brought onto the headland for processing and consumption. Spelt grains have been identified. The discovery of a single grain of millet, an imported cereal, is a first for Britain. Significantly the discovery of sprouted barley and oat grains suggest that malting and the making of ale took place on the headland during phase 1. Burnt seaweed, perhaps used to produce black salt and as a condiment in food processing, has also been identified (Campbell 2026).

Wood charcoals, from oak, hazel and twiggy peaty turf, showed that the post-Roman and early medieval communities on the headland had access to woodland zones and upper rough ground located in the immediate and wider hinterlands. These would have been economically exploited for structural and fuel purposes. Various species of Betulaceae and oak were both used for fuel in phase 1 (Hazell 2026).

### **Phase 1: settlement activities – metalwork and crafting**

A sizeable collection of iron and copper alloy objects found during the TCARP excavations shows the routine use of metalwork during the post-Roman and early medieval periods. A variety of identifiable metalwork objects from dress accessories to functional tools shed light on matters of personal dress, hunting, consumption, agricultural and woodcraft activities. The greatest number of iron objects were iron nails: one with a large shank and head may even be a ship's nail (Foster *et al* 2026).

No definitive evidence for metalwork manufacture on the headland was found, although routine maintenance of tools took place as several whetstones were found (Quinnell and Nowakowski 2026). Fragments of at least seven iron (tanged) knives are particularly notable in light of butchery and feasting events on the southern terrace during phase 1 (Foster *et al* 2026). Bent fragments of copper alloy strips and other broken metal objects were also found in the middens: these may have been curated for metal recycling. A stone mould fragment, cobble hammerstones and a couple of (baked clay) crucible fragments also found could suggest possibility of on-site metal-working. A small copper/bar ingot was also found (phase 2, SF5041; Nowakowski and Gossip 2026, fig 8.2). XRF (X-Ray Fluorescence) analysis of the crucible fragments suggests the working of base metals (Foster *et al* 2026). No structural furnaces were found although a small piece of furnace-lining was found on the southern terrace.

An unusual find was a glass linen smoother SF4130 (found in phase 3 contexts) on the southern terrace, used in textile production and aftercare (for pressing down linen pleats) (Tyson and Paynter 2026).

### **New insights into wider connectivity and operational networks at post-Roman Tintagel**

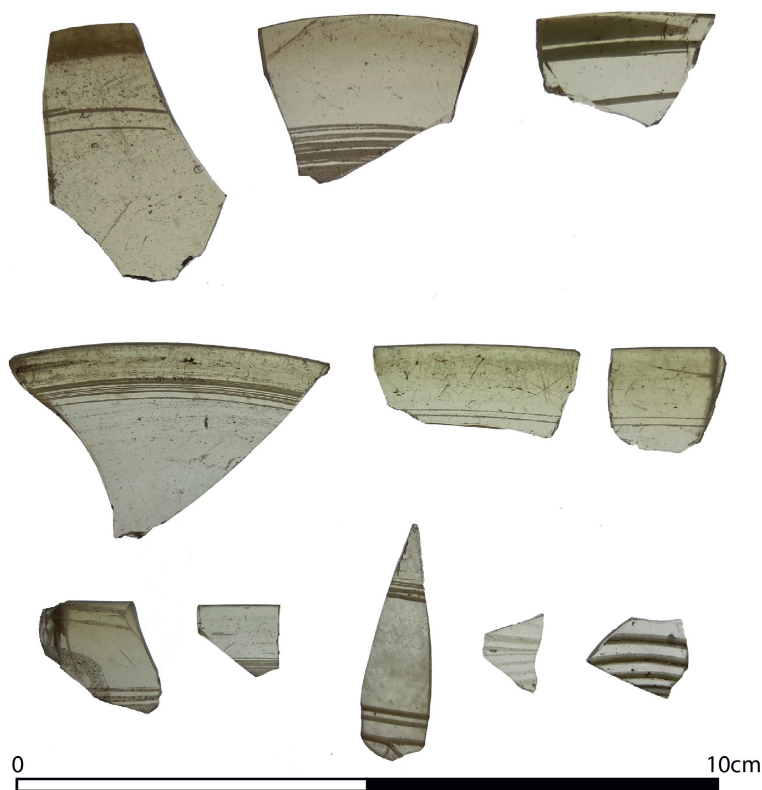
As discussed, Late Roman imported wares were first discovered at Tintagel by Radford's archaeological campaign in the 1930s (Radford 1956). Over the past 80 years this singular collection has increased in volume with Glasgow's work in the 1990s as well as many smaller archaeological interventions, many conducted by CAU (Nowakowski and Gossip 2026, fig 14.17). Tintagel has produced the greatest quantities of late Roman imported pottery and glassware in Britain (Duggan 2026).

The character and composition of the late Roman imported pottery found during TCARP is broadly typical of patterns of imported pottery found at sites located along the western Atlantic seaboard during the late fifth to first half of the sixth century AD. New analysis of this significant dataset (which has also included detailed petrographic analysis) has confirmed a much greater variety of imported pottery types than previously documented (Thorpe and Batey 2007; Duggan 2026; Duggan *et al* forthcoming). These pots have originated from, and

travelled to Tintagel from different places located within the Mediterranean basin. Significantly, new forms have been identified: amphorae sherds from southern Spain, mainland Greece in the Peloponnese, even an abraded handle sherd from the Levant. Imported coarsewares have also been identified at Tintagel for the first time (Duggan 2026).

Another highly significant import was glassware. Fragments of drinking cones and bowls were found during the TCARP. These were luxury items: a minimum of 21 vessels were found (mainly on the southern terrace). Many rim fragments display white-trailed decoration: the majority are popular styles in the Atlantic West during the fifth and sixth centuries AD. Fragments of Germanic glass dating to the fourth and fifth centuries have also been identified. The white-trailed glass vessels are amongst the earliest found to date in Britain (Tyson and Paynter 2026). Chemical analysis of a few items in the TCARP glass assemblage has shown that they were made of natron glass extracted from the dry lake beds in Egypt. The natron glass was transported in chunks, by boat, to places along the western Atlantic seaboard. The glass vessels were manufactured in workshops located in modern day south and south-west France and possibly Iberia (*ibid*). The glass drinking vessels found at Tintagel are also a key indicator of contact with communities in the western Atlantic zone where glass was a familiar everyday item. Some glass vessels had rounded bases and so, when full, they could not have been put down. Drinking culture was a communal activity where wine, ale and/or mead was passed around and shared. Once drunk, upending of the vessel signalled a formal end to hospitality. These objects were luxury items indicative of intercontinental contact: further evidence of the elite status of the settlement on the headland. Their discoveries at Tintagel give vivid insights into consumption practices: such high-status objects were used during social gatherings and at feasts where food and drink were shared.

As discussed above, the analysis of the animal bones in the primary middens showed that young pigs and cows, which provided good quality prime meat, were brought onto the headland specifically for eating. Feasting and the ability to host a feast was a powerful social tool where largesse and hospitality were bestowed. These set gatherings enhanced the esteem and social status of the host as the consumption of meat and drink with the



*Fig 11 White-tailed glass fragments excavated during TCARP. (© R Tyson 2022 from Nowakowski and Gossip, 2026, fig 6.3.)*

display of bounteous wealth through hospitality would have affirmed group loyalty, created social contracts and bonded alliances (Nowakowski and Gossip 2026).

The notable volumes and mixed variety of imported material culture (and the luxury commodities contained in the amphorae) indicate a much greater complexity to the operational exchange networks (with exchange of prestige goods) and connectivity across the western Atlantic seaboard than has previously been understood at Tintagel. As discussed, all the imported items discovered on the southern terrace were found in well-stratified (and reworked) middens which have been securely radiocarbon-dated. Scientific dates for activities on the southern terrace indicate several decades during the late fifth or the second quarter of the sixth century AD. On present scientific dating evidence these post-Roman imports may even have reached Tintagel for a restricted period.

It is assumed that the pots and glassware arrived at Tintagel by boat (Thomas 1988b; Fulford 1989).

How these items were distributed is unknown. In the first instance they may well have circulated via a cabotage system (within the Mediterranean basin) where boats setting out on a long journey would stop off at various places to add to and offload their cargoes on their way to their destination (Fig 12; *cf* Reynolds 2010; Nowakowski 2020). Passage to their destination, Tintagel, may have come more directly from a redistribution hub connected to a wider maritime exchange system where goods, other perishable commodities and luxuries had been moved across the Mediterranean from boat to boat. Maria Duggan (*pers comm*) has suggested that Vigo in north-west (modern day) Spain was a primary Atlantic redistribution hub or emporium port with a major direct link to Mediterranean exchange networks at this period. From here regional systems of connectivity through exchange networks would have operated up the western Atlantic seaboard with connections to settlement in post-Roman Britain (Duggan 2018).

Discoveries of large quantities of imported late Roman amphorae, tableware and coarsewares,

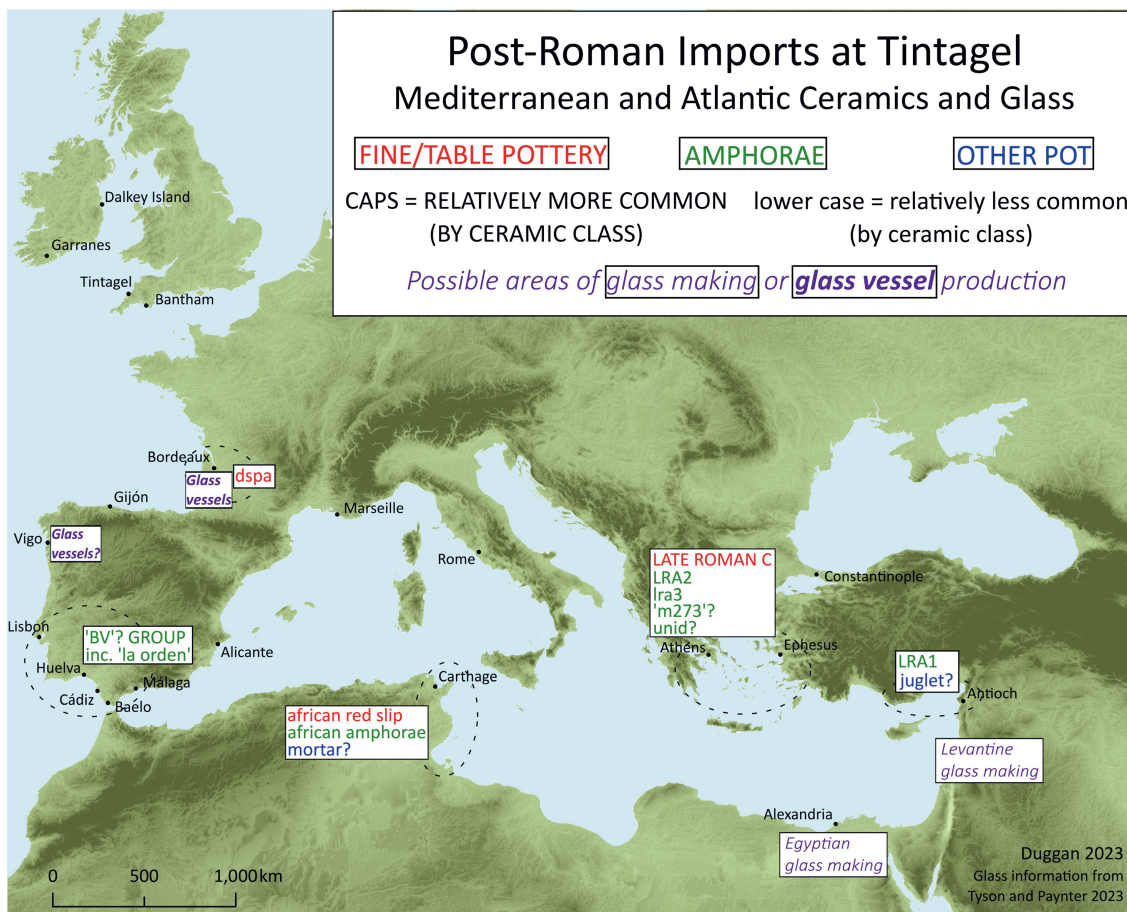


Fig 12 Map of locations across Mediterranean and Western Atlantic seaboard from which imported Late Roman amphorae, fine tableware and glass discovered at Tintagel originated. (©M Duggan, R Tyson and S Paynter, from Nowakowski and Gossip, 2026, fig 14.6.)

as well as imported glassware, underline the exceptional character of settlement at Tintagel in the post-Roman period and, alongside the evidence for literacy, confirm the elite status of its resident community (see below). Petrographic analyses of samples taken from Tintagel amphorae by Maria Duggan and Evangelia Kritiazi at the Fitch laboratory, (British School of Athens, Greece) has shown tremendous variety of origin sources (Duggan, pers comm; Duggan *et al* forthcoming). By originating from different parts of the eastern Mediterranean, mainland Greece, north Africa, southern Spain and the north-west Atlantic seaboard, these objects indicate directional contact and exchange. The imported pottery may be the only visible, surviving marker of long-distance contact:

they may also have included perishable items such as spices and textiles including silks. In addition, the quantity of fine wares is high for Britain. The recipients of fine tablewares, glass vessels and amphorae were clearly special occupants of the post-Roman settlement at Tintagel. Interpretation of the high community status of Tintagel as a regional power hub, and even perhaps the seat of a local warlord and/or leader in the ancient kingdom of Dumnonia accords well with such evidence (*cf* Thomas 1986, 71–6; Duggan 2018; Turner 2006).

No E ware sherds were found by TCARP. At the time of writing this marked absence suggests that intercontinental connectivity may have waned at Tintagel by the second half of the sixth century

AD. This working hypothesis requires testing in future archaeological research.

Analyses of key datasets excavated by TCARP have contributed major new insights: they reconfirm earlier observations on the elite status of the community on the headland during post-Roman times (*cf* Thomas 1993; Duggan 2018). The large quantities of imported objects and luxury commodities arriving onto the headland from distant shores is a mark of this special social status. The amphorae would have contained exotic foodstuffs (wine, olive oil, garum), and the fine tableware and fine glass drinking vessels were accoutrements of hospitality and a food sharing culture.

There are also the metal objects, as well as fine Cornish products such as the carved greisen (Trethurgy-type) bowls whose stylised forms may imitate Roman (silver) metalware (Quinnell 1993b; 2019b). Other signifiers of an elite community are the marked economic and husbandry practices: the drawing in and procurement of local and wider resources, obtained strategically, extracted as tribute and given as food render.

Also marked is how the resident community at Tintagel during the post-Roman period treated the disposal of the exotic material culture (and metal resources) along with food waste, using formal middens. On the southern terrace formal and rapid disposal practices were deployed to show off social status: acts of conspicuous consumption are marked. Furthermore, the presence of imported material in the middens has implications for the appearance, currency and circulation of imported items at Tintagel as a whole (Duggan 2026; Tyson and Paynter 2026; Nowakowski and Gossip 2026).

The imported goods represent prestige objects. The quantities and quality of these objects are exceptional for Britain. These have travelled great distances and so represent evidence for wider connectivity beyond the Cornish peninsula and a particular special kind of contact which denotes privileged access to centralised wealth and power. This archaeological evidence for wealth, imports, feasting and gift-distribution sits quite comfortably with the limited historical evidence for post-Roman kings of Dumnonia, and with the literary picture of the Cornish characters of King Mark and Queen Iseult at their legendary capital of Tintagel (Padel 1981; *cf* Bowden 2017).

### **Filling in gaps in our knowledge – early medieval Tintagel**

Archaeological evidence of activity on the headland from 800 to around 1100 AD (phases 2 and 3) found on the southern terrace is entirely new. It reveals that the headland had not been completely abandoned.

The exact character of activities signed to eighth and ninth centuries AD on the southern terrace remains elusive. But the discovery of locally produced early medieval Cornish pottery, coarsewares, and distinctive bar-lug vessels is new and exciting. These reveal active interregional networks which link Tintagel to other places across the Cornish peninsula. The discovery of upper greensand derived pottery (assigned to phase 3) shows some level of contact with contemporary sites in other places in western Britain (east Devon, Somerset, and maybe even Dorset). The presence of such diagnostic pottery on the headland reveals a continuation of drawing in resources from wider landscapes (Quinnell *et al* 2026). Overall, the evidence points to the lingering significance of Tintagel's earlier history beyond the sixth century and reveals that the headland continued to play some role during the formative centuries of early medieval Britain. TCARP has highlighted clear potential in future archaeological research to increase our knowledge about Tintagel in this period. Related research on the discoveries of long-cist graves found during excavations at Tintagel Churchyard in the early 1900s show direct links to the headland settlement: this was a contemporary burial ground and early cemetery (Nowakowski and Thomas 1991; 1992a; 1992b; Nowakowski and Gossip 2026; Nowakowski *et al* in preparation).

Excavations on the southern and the upper eastern terraces have clearly demonstrated the importance of archaeological fieldwork in shaping an informed understanding of the historical ruins seen above ground today. These new insights help us gain a better understanding of the potential changing status and shifting importance of settlement on Tintagel headland through time. Any perception that it maintained a single homogeneous character has been dismantled. Yet Tintagel clearly developed as a significant place in the wider landscape of western Britain in late Antiquity and this impacted on the development of its later historical character well into the early medieval period and beyond including the present day. It

is indeed a place where *History Meets Legend* (Greaney 2020).

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