

NOTICE OF CERTAIN ANCIENT REMAINS RECENTLY DISCOVERED  
IN WEST CORNWALL.

In October, 1860, some evidences, previously very rare, of the Roman occupation of West Cornwall, were discovered in a field on the manor of Carminow, near Helston, on the shores of the Mount's Bay. The discovery was communi-



Fig. 1. Coast of Mount's Bay, showing the site of the discovery at A.

cated to the Royal Institution of Cornwall,<sup>1</sup> and the relics were exhibited at one of their monthly meetings; they have been noticed also in this Journal.<sup>2</sup> The number of fragments of various vessels of pottery then found, led to the expectation that at a future day the neighbourhood might yield some further proof of Roman occupation in that remote locality.

It was, therefore, with no small satisfaction that I made a second discovery in October, 1862, very near the site of the former; and I should be glad to find that any evidence could

<sup>1</sup> See their Transactions of 1861, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> Arch. Journ. vol. xviii. p. 168.

be adduced to warrant the supposition that this is Roman also. After some days of heavy rain, which fell in October, one of the cart-ruts in an old road-way leading from the Loe-bar southwards, was so deeply channeled by the water as to lay bare some stonework which lay across its course, at a depth of little more than a foot below the surface of the road.

The spot is so close to the sea-shore that the entire hill-side is often sprinkled with sand, which is blown from the beach during every heavy gale from the Atlantic which washes the shores of the Mount's Bay. The driven sand supports a scanty herbage for sheep. A careful excavation was immediately made, and on the second day the small building, of which a representation and plan are here given, was disclosed to view.

The structure consisted of two circular ovens or fire-places,

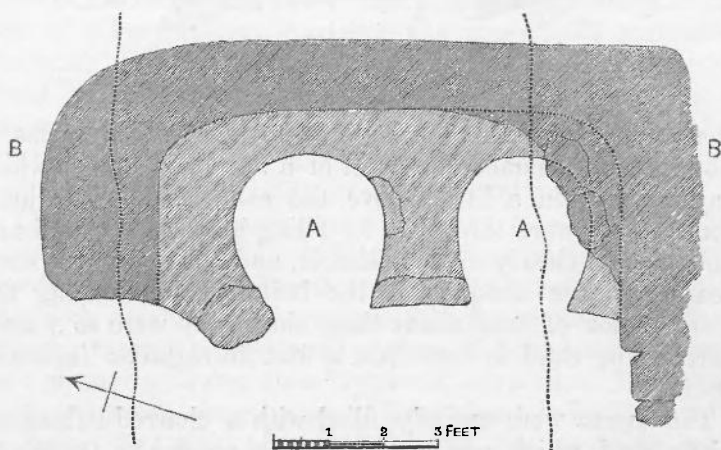


Fig. 2. Plan of the Ovens, A A. B B. Sandbank on either side of the old roadway, defined by the transverse dotted lines.

(A A in plan, fig. 2) formed of the clay-slate of the district, and cemented with a mortar of earth and sand, with a very small portion of lime; the ovens lay beside each other, with roughly paved floors of slates, the side towards the sea being open to the level of the floor.

A kind of hob of stonework ran round the sides and back of the ovens at a level of 20 in. above the floor, screened at the back, towards the land, by a low wall rising from the hob, 16 in. thick, to the height of about 5 feet from the floor.

This wall followed a careful curve at the north end, and at the south end it died away in a straight line in the sand-bank against which it was apparently built. At this end it

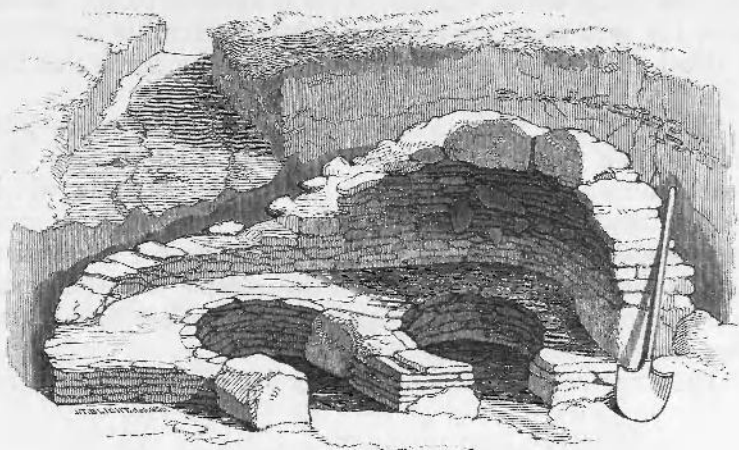


Fig. 3. The pair of Ovens.

overhangs the southern oven in a manner which seems to show that it assumed the form of a flue or chimney, which may have risen a little above the sand-bank. The loose stones which were thrown in for filling between the wall and the bank are clearly distinguishable, and may serve as some measure of the antiquity of the building, by showing the accumulation of sand above them since they were so placed there. The sand is here from a foot to eighteen inches in depth.

The ovens were entirely filled with a charred substance, chiefly sand, which appeared to be the residue of the sandy peat or turf that had evidently been used for fuel, together with some small fragments of charcoal. The whole interior of each oven had been blackened by fire, and the mortar burnt out from the crevices of the stones.

No fragments of pottery, glass, or metal, were found, except a small point of iron, two inches long, but its form had been quite destroyed by oxidation.

The whole building measures only about twelve feet in diameter within.

What then was its use, and what its probable date?

The presence of a kind of slag, or mineral refuse, at first

suggested the notion that the building was a furnace for smelting tin in Roman times, and this belief appeared to be strengthened by the fact of tin having been found not many years ago within a few paces of the spot. Peat, too, such as was here found, was considered in ancient times to be, next to charcoal, the best fuel for smelting ores; and it is believed that the Romans were in the habit of reducing<sup>3</sup> tin as well as lead. A closer examination, however, of the burnt stones, and an analysis of the slag and charred sand, dispelled this belief; for it was found that neither the slag nor the sand contained any tin or other metal, and the stones and mortar failed to exhibit evidence of having been exposed to the degree of heat necessary even for the rudest method of reducing ores.

The smelting-house theory, therefore, though attractive to a Cornish man, must, it is feared, be abandoned.

Can the building, however, have any connection with the Roman discovery of 1860? Its situation beneath the surface of a very ancient roadway, and the closely compacted character of the superincumbent soil (a shingly sand, composed of small pebbles, not of shells, and therefore not so easily borne upon the wind, and which would accumulate much more slowly than shell sand by the process of drifting), are circumstances pointing to a remote antiquity.

The masonry, though very different from that of the massive Roman works which exist in our ancient cities and Roman stations, is, nevertheless, carefully and evenly laid, with nice attention to curvature, and the mortar contains a portion, though a very small portion, of lime; no limestone rock occurring nearer than Plymouth, more than 70 miles by land, and much more by sea. Everything, indeed, points to its being the work of a skilled hand, for, probably, some temporary purpose.

Besides the discovery of Roman remains within a distance of 150 yards, an ancient earthwork, extending some 300 yards southwards, commences within a few feet of the building, and is so situated as to have been suitable for affording protection seaward and along the shore to any small force lodged within it.

The conjecture, therefore, which presents itself as the most reasonable is that the building was erected for some culinary

<sup>3</sup> See notice of an ancient smelting place for tin, near Penzance.—Royal Cornwall Geol. Trans., 1841, p. 43.

or other purpose connected with the small military force which may have occupied the earthwork.

I have communicated with Captain John Grant (late R. A.), whose system of cooking apparatus for the British army is so well known, with a view to ascertain whether any such structure as this has come under his notice, during the course of his examination of the subject, and he informs me that he has never seen or heard of anything like it.

It will be interesting to know whether any example has fallen under the notice of others.

JOHN J. ROGERS.

The Central Committee desire to acknowledge the kindness of the author in presenting to the society the illustrations accompanying this memoir.

We are indebted to Colonel Sir Henry James, Director of the Ordnance Survey, a keen observer of ancient vestiges in Cornwall, his native county, for the suggestion, that possibly the little building described by Mr. Rogers may have served in the process of heating caldrons for pitch, to "pay" the bottoms of vessels, which may there have been drawn ashore in olden times. Possibly, however, the furnace may have been used for boiling "wose," or tan-water, which might be required for steeping fishing-nets. The circumstances under which the remains have been brought to light certainly appear to point to a remote period as the date of construction.