

Historic Watercourses

Developing a method for identifying the historic character of watercourses

The archaeology and history of the Dorset Stour is the focus of a project being carried out by Fjodr Ltd. for Historic England. Fjodr is a small consultancy based in Tisbury, Wiltshire. Historic England is funding the project as part of its Heritage Protection Commissions Programme.



Blandford Bridge – built, widened and repaired in C18th and C19th, but there had been a bridge since C13th and a ford since Anglo-Saxon times.

The project is a pilot to develop a methodology for identifying the historic character of watercourses. Rivers are a focus for a great deal of work at the moment to reduce flood risk, to improve water quality and to enable better conservation of important species and habitats. Rivers are also affected by development and construction, including works to bridges. These activities don't always take account of the very long history of human intervention in riverine environments.

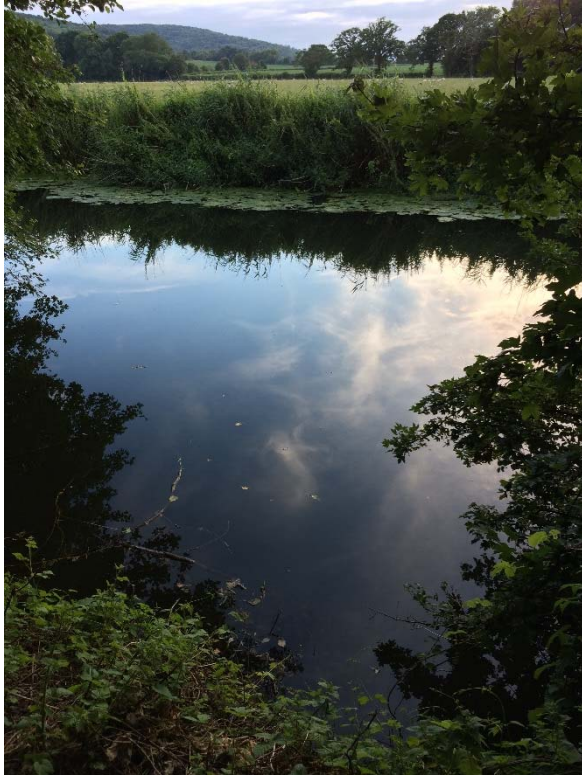
Rivers have played a central role in the historical development of our landscape but the archaeology of watercourses in England has rarely received much direct attention. The intention of this project is to make information on the archaeology and history of rivers more easily available to the people responsible for managing our watercourses.

The project encompasses the Dorset Stour from its source at Stourhead all the way to Christchurch Harbour where it reaches the sea. We are looking principally at the main channel of the Stour rather than its many tributaries. Nevertheless, we are including examples from the wider catchment where they illustrate historic features not seen in the main channel. The character of the Stour varies along its length, including a wide range of rural, urban and suburban settings.



The river has been heavily modified with earthworks and new channels to power water mills, as here at White Mill on the Kingston Lacy estate.

We are concentrating on the presence and potential of archaeological material within and immediately adjacent to watercourses. We are also looking at changes to the route and form of the river as a result of human activity in the past. We are examining evidence from early prehistory to the present day, including archaeological records, historic maps and Environment Agency LIDAR data.



We are considering every aspect of river-based activity in the past, including mills, navigation, water meadows, historic bridges, riverside settlements and waterfronts.

The project has been framed around Defra's Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) and we are collaborating with the Stour Catchment Initiative (SCI). We are also looking at the scope to engage the public in better understanding the historic character of watercourses, so that they can contribute their own archaeological and historical information about watercourses. The project is also intended to increase awareness of the importance of rivers to communities in the past.

If you have any information about the archaeology and history of the River Stour and would like to get in touch then please email info@fjodr.com.

The River Stour runs close to a series of Iron Age hillforts, as here at Hod Hill, suggesting that the river was important for communication in prehistory.

Fjodr Ltd
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