



Eye Bridge

The River Stour rises in Somerset and enters the sea at Hengistbury Head. Just West of Wimborne lies Eye Mead, 120 acres of hedges and pasture on the banks of the Stour, today mostly owned by the National Trust. The name means "Island Meadow", first mentioned in 1253. A look at the Ordnance Survey map explains the name, it is surrounded by two branches of the river, forming an island of meadows. It is a beautiful place.

Today the Northern branch of the Stour is straight and can be deep when there is no drought. But the Southern branch meanders for nearly 2 miles across the Stour floodplain before rejoining the Northern branch just downstream of Eye Bridge, a ford and the weir. Closer inspection reveals that the meander has no running water; it has been blocked at the upstream end by infilling over some 40 yards. Why did this happen, and when? <http://www.eyemead.com/project.htm>

A visit to the Record Office in Dorchester revealed two old maps of the area. An 'Enclosure map' dated 1813 named the meander as "Lake Mill Stream", and half way along (close to today's Lake Gates roundabout on the A31) was Lake Mill. Today there is no trace of the Mill - and the Stream which once drove the Mill contains only stagnant water and is overgrown with reeds. But the Stream was the parish and civil boundary, and was obviously important in the past. What happened?

Further back in time, when the Romans invaded Dorset in 44 AD, they landed at Hamworthy and built a large fortress on the South bank of Lake Mill Stream. This was discovered by excavations between 1959 and 1980, and was manned by around 3,500 troops of the Second Augustan Legion, led by Vespasian (who later became Emperor). At this point lay Lake Ford, the main crossing of the Stour. Lake Farm Fort became the Roman Army HQ for perhaps 15 years until it was moved to Exeter. In that time famous British hillforts were captured by the Romans; Badbury Rings, Maiden Castle, Hod Hill, Hambledon Hill, Flower's Barrow, Spettisbury and Waddon.

British history was totally changed by what happened on the banks of Lake Mill Stream nearly 2000 years ago.

www.wimbornehistorytrail.uk