

“Using Imagery to Identify the Historical Character of Watercourses” ‘The Dorset Stour’ Newsletter No.1 October 2017

In April 2017 Historic England commissioned Coastal & Geotechnical Services to undertake a study, which will examine how imagery from the late 18th century up to 1960 can support our understanding of the historic character of watercourses, and thereby encourage and revitalise protection and management of heritage sites within river catchments from source to sea.

The Study, which will focus on the Dorset Stour catchment, is being undertaken by Professor Robin McInnes OBE, who has a particular experience of the interpretation and use of historical images (paintings, watercolours, prints and old photographs). This study follows the ‘CHERISH’ project (Coastal Heritage Risks Imagery in Support of Heritage Management), which was completed for Historic England in 2016.

Rivers form a key component of the English landscape and have played a crucial role in the development of our cultural heritage; however, rivers heritage has received relatively little attention in recent years. This six month study aims to provide, through historical imagery, visual data and information that will contribute towards improving our understanding of the historic character of the Dorset Stour, and English rivers more widely. The study will take advantage of a wealth of currently under-used images dating from the 1770s held in both public and private collections, allowing us to recall how culturally important sites along rivers were represented in the past, and approaches to their maintenance and management during this period (1770-1960). The study will help inform a wide variety of rivers stakeholders: researchers, planners, local residents, and support river management in general.

Professor McInnes is collaborating closely with Dr Antony Firth of Fjodr Ltd who is carrying out a wider study for Historic England on the historic character of watercourses based on the Dorset Stour, which this image-based study will support and inform. The first steps of this project have included an in-depth search for relevant artworks, old photographs and postcards depicting the River Stour and life on and within its catchments; this has been undertaken with the assistance of the region’s art galleries, museums, heritage centres, image libraries and auction houses. Data and information provided by the Environment Agency has also proved valuable to the building up of the case studies in the Stour catchment.



1. ‘The Mill at Sturminster Newton’ by Henry Moule. c.1880s. Courtesy of Dorset County Museum.



2. ‘A View of the Gardens of Stourhead’ by C. P. Bampflyde. c.1770s. Courtesy of The National Trust

3. ‘By the River’ by Peter Monstead. 1908. Courtesy of Bonham’s.



4. ‘On the Stour’ by Walter Frederick Tyndale. 1906.



Professor McInnes said “the project case studies will illustrate how this image-based approach can provide additional information to support management and good practice for riverside and in-river heritage sites. Such images will allow us to recall how such culturally important sites have been artistically represented in the past, and they can illustrate the various approaches that have been taken to management over the last two centuries or where the approach has been unmanaged”.

The study results will include a comprehensive, ranked list of river artists, based on their value of contribution and level of accuracy, and from this create a fully transferable approach, applicable to any river system in England. The main output will be a well-illustrated Project Report – available for download – complete with examples illustrating the practical uses of river imagery as a supportive tool to river and heritage management and suitable for dissemination to a wide range of stakeholders.

Updates on this project will be posted at:

www.coastalandgeotechnicalservices.com

The ‘CHerISH’ project final report can be viewed and downloaded at: <http://cherish.maritimearchaeologytrust.org/>



8. White Mill Bridge, Sturminster Marshall. Photo: S. McInnes, 2017.

Can you assist this project? If you have not been approached and would like further information please contact us by email or telephone. We are searching for more highly detailed oil paintings and watercolours (1770-1950) of the River Stour (Dorset), which show heritage structures (e.g.: mills, bridges, weirs, river-based activities, barges or other river vessels and other heritage features), or which illustrate the progressive development of the towns and villages along the river since the late 18th century. If you think you have such an image or useful information that may be of interest please contact Robin McInnes.

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5. ‘Gillingham Bridge’ by John Constable RA. 1823. Courtesy of Tate Images, 2016.



6. ‘Rear view of Walford Mill, Wimborne’ by A. H. Davis. Courtesy of Russell-Cotes Art Gallery, Bournemouth.



7. ‘Hod Hill showing the site of the Roman Camp’. c.1930. Courtesy of Dorset County Museum



9. ‘Christchurch Priory’ by Henry Wimbush. c.1900.