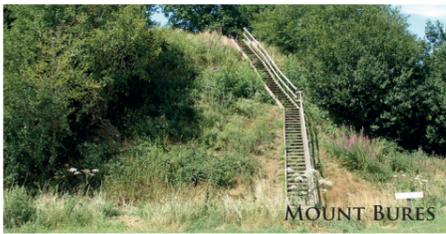


STOUR VALLEY HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY

The Stour Valley is well known for its outstanding landscape of meandering river and gentle valley slopes. The creation of this special landscape has taken place over many thousands of years and clues to its geology and unfolding history can be found throughout the valley.

Beneath the scenery made famous by artists John Constable and Thomas Gainsborough is a secret landscape with over 200 sites and artefacts recorded in Essex and Suffolk's Historic Environment Record for the Stour Valley. Evidence of human activity covers the whole of prehistory from the earliest Stone Age right up to the Iron Age. Relics such as a Stone Age flint hand axe and flint tools have been found, especially around Bures, proving that people lived in the valley since the end of the last Ice Age. The Stour Valley was also significant during the Roman period with the River Stour providing a route for trading and importing Roman luxury goods such as wine, pottery and jewels.

Not all evidence of the region's past is underground. The remains of Clare Castle, built after the Norman conquests, is still visible and is popular with visitors to Clare Castle Country Park. At Mount Bures, the remains of a motte - thought to have been built during the 12th century civil war over



English succession as a lookout post and place of safety for residents - can still be climbed via a flight of stairs today.

The River Stour

One of the defining features of the Stour Valley landscape is the river itself. Providing not only a route for transport and trade but also as a source of power for water mills grinding wheat for flour. The introduction of locks on the River Stour meant that specially designed Stour Lighters (similar to barges) could carry a wide variety of cargo including bricks, grain, flour and hay down to Mistley Quay where it would then be transported to London. The area can be best explored by walking all or some of the sections of the 60-mile Stour Valley Path.

Changing Landscape

The Stour Valley holds both the secrets of human past and evidence of how the landscape was created. Like most of the East Anglian region, the Stour Valley was formed by the impact of glacial climate conditions of the retreating Anglian ice sheet. This has left the valley with fertile grazing land and narrow flood plains surrounded by gently rising slopes. In Constable Country, the sunken lanes (hollow ways) where the lanes run down to the valley bottoms, the winding roads, and the isolated farms so typical of this area are evidence of this ancient landscape. It is commonly thought that the lower and middle parts of the Stour Valley is all ancient landscape, with more planned landscape in the upper Stour Valley in the Great Bradley to Sturmer area.

Planned landscape is often characterised by larger and more rectangular fields and straighter roads created by Parliamentary Enclosure in the 19th century.

Mighty Trees

The Stour Valley is home to important fragments of diverse ancient woodland. A key indicator species of this hugely important habitat is Small-leaved Lime. The area between Sudbury and



Hadleigh is especially important for this species, which was traditionally coppiced. Evidence of long-practiced coppicing, as well as pollarding, can also be seen on the impressive and mature Willow trees along the banks of the River Stour between Flatford and Dedham. Other typical ancient woodland and hedgerow species are

Pedunculate Oak, Ash and Field Maple. A particularly notable tree in Stour Valley woodland areas is Wild Cherry, with some impressive mature specimens at Arger Fen and Spouse's Vale. Elms were also once a common sight in Stour Valley hedgerows, although mature specimens are now very rare due to fungal Dutch Elm disease.



Historic Churches

More evidence of the past can be seen at the many historic churches and religious buildings of the Valley. For example: Clare Priory is one of the oldest in the country; the wool trade wealth of the past built soaring 'wool churches' that dominate the landscape; and changing architectural styles, such as flint work on outside stonework, or round towers designed as look out points, evidence different significant historical periods.

For more information about these unique and inspiring places, please see the 'Churches of the Stour Valley' leaflet, also available in this series and downloadable from www.dedhamvalestourvalley.org.



Left: Bures Dragon. Centre: Clare Ancient House Museum. Right: Ketwell Hall, Long Melford (Photo credit: Anthony Burch).

Exploring Online

There is a wealth of information available online about the history and archaeological features of the Stour Valley.

The following archives are a good place to start if you're looking to learn more:

- www.suffolkarchives.co.uk/places/a-z-of-suffolk/s-for-stour-valley
- www.essexarchivesonline.co.uk

STEP INTO THE PAST IN THE STOUR VALLEY

Travelling through the Stour Valley offers visitors a window into the past. The beautiful towns and villages were developed on the wealth of the cloth trade with the River Stour providing the channel for trade, and the landscape being shaped by the underlying geology and human development. There are examples of prehistory at several locations along the river valley.

Wandering through Long Melford or Lavenham for example, visitors can see many historic buildings and churches, in fact, in the town of Clare, there are 133 listed buildings. Step into the past at Clare Castle or Melford Hall or travel along the river in a Stour Lighter from Sudbury to experience how goods were once transported along the river.

The Stour Valley provides days of exploration, as it reveals its hidden treasures one by one. Walking the many footpaths can help reveal the underlying shape of the landscape beneath your feet, and looking up while wandering the village streets will open your eyes to intriguing architecture and special features.

VISITING THE STOUR VALLEY



Please consider travelling sustainably where possible. There are good links to the Stour Valley on the Gainsborough rail line between Marks Tey and Sudbury, and there are bus routes throughout the area. For up to date local public transport timetables, contact Traveline on: www.traveline.info or 0871 200 22 33.



For detailed maps of the area, use Ordnance Survey Explorer Map No's. 196 (Sudbury, Hadleigh and the Dedham Vale), 210 (Newmarket and Haverhill), 211 (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) and 195 (Braintree and Saffron Walden)

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Front cover image: Clare Castle Country Park

History & Archaeology in THE STOUR VALLEY



Explore the Stour Valley with a series of guides