

THE RIPPLE EFFECT Site 1: Horatio's Garden

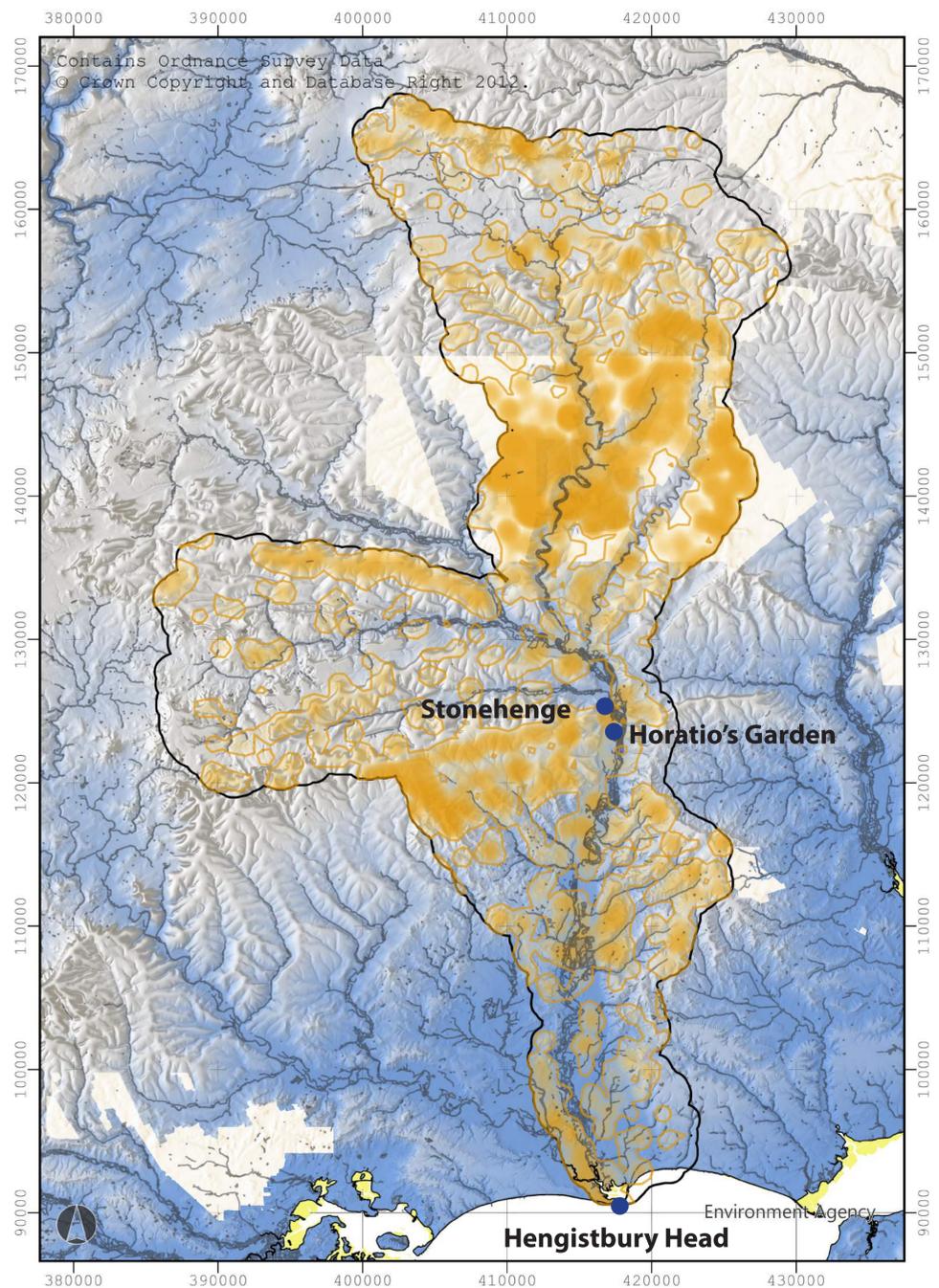
Just over a kilometre from Horatio's Garden flows one of the most iconic rivers in Britain – the Hampshire Avon. The Avon rises in the Vale of Pewsey, just north of Salisbury, and is fed by substantial chalk aquifers (underground rock layers that contain water). The Avon flows south through a diverse landscape of chalk downlands and picturesque valleys, sprawling farmland and the New Forest before reaching its home in Christchurch Harbour. Many people reading this will have encountered the river in various ways, swimming in its cold waters or kayaking on its surface. Some may have fished from its banks, and others might prefer walking alongside from the comfort of a footpath.



Harbridge Stream near Ibsley, a side stream of the Avon.
Photo: Joanna Ostapkowicz

In the Bronze and Early Iron Ages of prehistory (the time before written history), c. 2500–400 BC, the River Avon was also the site of diverse activities. Rivers would have been sources of food and fresh water, which were necessary to sustain the growing population. Around rivers, communities lived in roundhouses on farmsteads in the Middle and Late Bronze Ages and divided up the land by creating field systems. They grew wheat and barley and kept cattle, sheep and pigs, which would have provided food and wool. They also hunted wild animals, such as boar and red deer, and no doubt caught freshwater fish, though there is surprisingly little evidence for fish on the menu. Bronze Age people created burial monuments called barrows (earthen mounds) to honour their ancestors, who were often cremated. Later in the Early Iron Age from around 700 BC, larger settlements called hillforts were built. These were enclosures of up to 19 hectares that were typically (though not always) built on top of hills. Just on the other side of Odstock Road, the remnants of the Great Woodbury hillfort are visible today from aerial photographs. You can even see it on Google Maps.

It was not always easy living near a river in prehistory. In times of extreme weather, they would have flooded, endangering the lives of people and animals settled around them. We see this happen across the UK each winter – today, it is estimated that 40% of the properties in Salisbury are at risk of flooding annually. Luckily, we have flood management plans that help protect us. In prehistory, communities had to manage floods without modern technology. Perhaps this is why archaeologists often find valuable metalwork, like swords and spears, in rivers. Were people making offerings to the river, in an attempt to ensure safety?

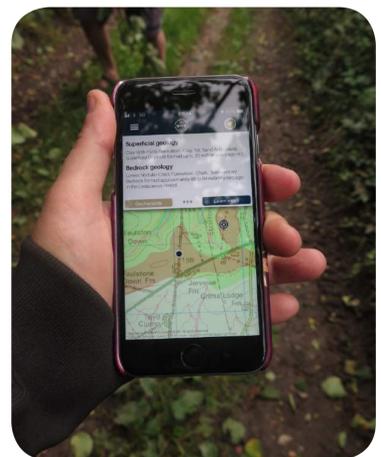


The River Avon case study area, showing concentrations of Bronze Age and Iron Age records (in orange), topography and watercourses.

The Avon flows through the Salisbury Plain, which is one of the richest archaeological areas of England. This is where Stonehenge was first created in the Neolithic period (c. 4000–2500 BC). People would have used the river to travel into the interior of southern Britain from the south coast at Christchurch Harbour. Interestingly, that is where the famous Iron Age hillfort Hengistbury Head is located. It is likely that Hengistbury Head was a port in earlier periods. The Avon would have connected many monuments that were built up around it, such as Stonehenge. How do we know people used the river for travel?

One technique archaeologists use is to analyse the skeletons of prehistoric people themselves. This approach takes advantage of the well known adage: 'we are what we eat'. Certain types of foods leave traces in bones and teeth that can be used to distinguish, for example, how regularly an individual ate fish. This is why we are able to say for the Bronze and Iron Ages: not very often! A related approach is that 'we are where we eat'. Foods, especially plant foods like cereals, contain a 'geochemical signal' that relates to the geology of where the plant grew, and this is retained in our bones and teeth. We measure modern plants to see how they vary across the landscape, and this allows us to better understand which parts of the landscape were the focus of farming in the past, and how often people moved between regions with different 'signals'.

Professor Rick Schulting uses the British Geological Survey's *iGeology* and *mySoil* apps on his phone to guide his plant sampling strategy.



The *Ripple Effect* is a public engagement project about rivers in prehistory. This is one of 11 installations that display original artworks alongside a description of local archaeology. Miranda Creswell's painting 'Talking', installed in a separate noticeboard in the garden, depicts people talking by a river. It draws inspiration from Horatio's Garden charity, which provides patients, friends, family and staff, solace and peace to be able to talk within a natural setting even though they are in a hospital. The painting reminds us how people must have always conversed next to the Avon, whether in prehistory or today. See all 11 installations and learn more about the exciting archaeology within and around the Avon at *The Ripple Effect* website: <https://bit.ly/3qAbZVo> or use the QR code here.



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