

# An Archaeological Walk Through Time

Start: Milford Mill Road medieval bridge.

This Grade 1 Listed structure dates from the 1490s. But there had already long been a bridge at Milford by 1386, when it was reported to be broken and was said to have been repaired immemorably by the villagers of Milford Pychard, Milford Richard, and Milford Episcopi. Before the Bourne was bridged, a ford took a (probable) minor Roman road from the villa estates to the east and ultimately from Venta Belgarum (Winchester) to Sorviodunum (Old Sarum).

Detour briefly down the grassy approach to the ford, on Laverstock side, to look up at the bridge. There are two pairs of archways of dressed lime-stone; the western arch is semi-circular, the other three are pointed. Note the cutwaters with weathered heads between each pair of arches. At road level there is a roll-moulded continuous string course. The parapet has weathered C18 coping and square piers at either end.



Stop by the Information Board. In the field to your right, was a late Anglo-Saxon village recorded as 'Meleford' in 1086. If the sun is low you might see the slight ridges and hollows of this long-vanished settlement. It is possible that 'Meleford' was later known as Milford Richard (see above) as in the late 12<sup>th</sup> C there was a Richard de Meleford who held land here. Looking ahead of you up Queen Manor Road towards Potters Way, there were at least two and possibly three settlements close to the junction with Gypsy Lane. We know that one of them was called Milford Pychard, probably this was the village closely associated with the 13<sup>th</sup> C pottery industry hereabouts. The other two villages are late Anglo-Saxon (A/S) and 11<sup>th</sup>C. Potters Way and the fields to the right of Queen Manor Road revealed plentiful evidence of the pottery kilns that serviced the demands of Clarendon Palace.

Now take the boardwalk alongside Milford Mill Road and after 35 metres look first to the railway embankment on your right. The brick structure on the skyline is double-walled enfiling position from WWII, which overlooked an anti-tank ditch (filled-in in 1945) which ran from under your feet and diagonally across the fields on the other side of Milford Mill Road. If you now look down to your immediate left you will see the concrete remains of the bridge which crossed the ditch.



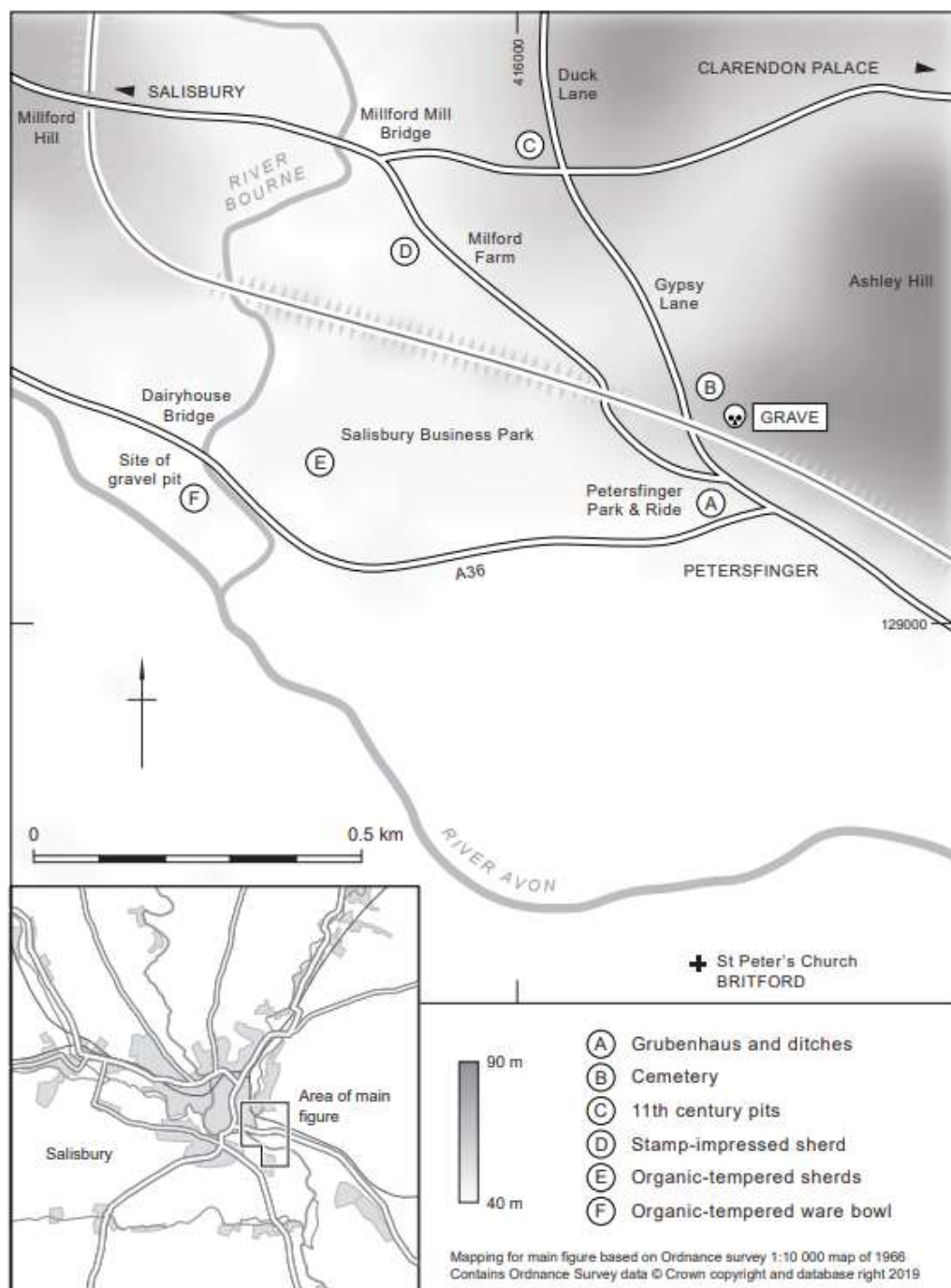
As you walk towards Milford House Care Home, this part of the field on the right has yielded potsherds from the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> C – and thus much earlier than Meleford or Richard. These sherds are evidence of the extent of another A/S village, but of at least regional significance, and to which we will return shortly.



At the end of the boardwalk, Milford Farm to your left is of the 18<sup>th</sup> C. Continue with great caution along Milford Mill Road and under the rail bridge. Then take Petersfinger Road immediately to the left until reaching a Bridleway sign 300 metres on the left and near Elmsfield House. This track is the southern end of Gypsy Lane and part of an ancient valley route which runs up through Laverstock to connect with the Roman roads east of Old Sarum. The land part occupied by the gardens and paddocks of Elmsfield and part by the Park and Ride, conceal the remains of a very early A/S settlement excavated in 2009 and possibly dating from the late 5<sup>th</sup> C. The star discovery, under the Park and Ride, was a Grubenhaus, or 'sunken floor building,' together with other evidence of settlement. Only 150-yards away up Gypsy Lane is the site of an early 6<sup>th</sup> C cemetery, excavated by Stuart Pigott in 1948 and 1951, which included 64 warrior burials, many furnished with swords. It is intriguing to consider whether some of these warriors had fought at the battle of Sarum in 552 when Cynric defeated the Romano-Britons.



*An Anglo-Saxon warrior burial of 6th C from near-by Salisbury Plain.*



Map showing location of graves, related sites and places referred to in the text.  
By kind permission of Peter Saunders and David Algar.

The proximity of this cemetery to the Grubenhause settlement must mean a relationship between the two. Given the late 5<sup>th</sup> C or early 6<sup>th</sup> C date, and the geographically remote location of the settlement, is it fanciful to suggest these Anglo-Saxons were not invaders but *foederati* (mercenaries or allies) employed by the remnants of Romano-British rule and settled on marginal territory as part-payment? The centre of this vestigial authority could have been *Sorviodunum* or even the large Roman villa complex on the far side of nearby Ashley Hill. It could be that it was the long-settled sons or grandsons of these *foederati* who rose in support of their ethnic kinsmen and drove out their neighbours, or at least some of them (see below).

The presence of Iron Age sherds in the Grubenhause dig and in backfill from outlier graves, together with the discovery of a Roman brooch nearby, make it clear that the Anglo-Saxons are unlikely to be the first occupiers of this area.

On the other side of the Avon is Britford. This is a rare example of a pre-Saxon settlement of Britons that somehow survived the upheavals of the A/S era to live in some sort of toleration of each other. Britford (or *Bryt Fordingea* in Old English), as the name indicates, was at a crossing point of the river. The village church of St Peter has two quite sensational porticus (small transept rooms) on either side of the nave. The porticus in the south wall has an arch of re-used Roman brick, and on the north side the stone slab reveal is uniquely decorated with vine scrolls which may date from 700 AD. This extraordinary building appears to be in direct alignment with the Gypsy Lane valley route, which is probably pre-Roman. There must, too, be a connection between the name Petersfinger and Britford's parish church?



*Voussoirs of Roman tiles at the porticus*

Now turn round and follow the bridleway under the railway bridge. The quarry up to your right (now occupied by Travellers and behind fencing) is the site of the A/S cemetery. Follow the track past a concrete bollard – note how deep and 'hollow' the track is, how worn away by the usage of centuries - and then take the muddy track on your right that passes round the quarry. This footpath skirts Ashley Hill on the summit of which scattered Roman building material indicates a farmstead or small villa.

Continue for ten minutes to Ranger's Lodge Farm. Turn left onto the Clarendon track and then almost immediately right onto the footpath. After 50 metres or so take the left fork and pass the farm cottages. Climbing steadily, carry straight on past the permissive path.



Three hundred yards further on the left and close to the wire fence are two low mounds – these are probably post-medieval rabbit warrens. A little further along the track, the field to the left reveals the faint network of a field system – best seen in slanting light. The system is undated, but the ridge patterns suggest a 13<sup>th</sup> century date.

Walking along this path you will glimpse Burrough's Hill House. There is evidence of a Neolithic flint quarry here. Also, there is a mound immediately in front of the house called 'Byrhtferth's Low'. As '*Byrhtferthes Hlaewe*' in Old English, this tumulus is mentioned in King Eadred's Anglo-Saxon charter of 949 AD and defines the parish boundary of Laverstock and Ford. It is interesting to note the similarity between 'Byrht' here and the 'Bryt' of Britford – and even more intriguing that the church tower at Britford can be seen from Burroughs Hill.

Follow this path until reaching a metal kissing gate on the right. Take this footpath along Laverstock Down towards Cockey Down. This is an archaeologically rich area. On the slope below you as you leave the gate, sherds of Roman pottery were found in the 1990s. The hilltop above the belt of trees to your right is the site of a cemetery of disputed date: the graves contained crouched inhumations including one with the bones of a newborn child. The burials may be Romano-British – which would be consistent with extensive evidence of Roman settlements along the Cockey Down ridge and connected by a sunken track.

Walk diagonally downhill for 200 yards to another kissing gate (in bad repair). Go through the gate and walk towards Church Road. In the middle of the field to your right are the traces of the field system, where a Bronze Age drinking vessel was found in the 1950s.

On reaching Church Road turn left and visit the foundations of the medieval St Andrew's at the rear of the Victorian church. Somewhere among the weeds at the very back of the site are the fragments of a Roman sarcophagus which was found when builders were laying out Greenwood Avenue in the 1930s. Unbelievably, the coffin was broken up in the 1970s and the greensand pieces scattered.

Cross the road and take the first road on the left. This is Duck Lane, an extension of Gypsy Lane and part of the ancient North-South valley route. Note 'The Thatch' cottage on the corner which dates from the late 17<sup>th</sup> C. Much of the left side of the lane was given over to allotments until the 1930s, and the land on the right comprised the grounds of Laverstock House Asylum which opened in 1781 and was demolished in 1955. Note the short stretch of wall on your right, alongside 'Appleby.' The wall, which dates from the 17<sup>th</sup> C and predates the asylum, consists of flint nodules, clunch (chalky limestone), and Chilmark stone said to have been taken from Old Sarum; the tile capping to this wall may originally have been thatched in the manner of cob walls.

Stop for a moment at the junction of Duck Lane with The Avenue. Up to your left, on the site of the playground, was a terrace of notoriously primitive cottages called 'The Barracks.' The cottages had no military connection but were named for their dreariness; they lacked even basic amenities and were only demolished in 1937. In front of The Barracks there was a short row of small, thatched cottages that ended at the track by the Duck Inn. They too lacked sanitation but did not disappear until the late 1950s.



*17th C wall Laverstock House Asylum*

Continue past the Duck Inn, which dates from 1906, until reaching Queen Manor Road. Turn right at Queen Manor Road and back to Milford Mill Road bridge.

### Guided Walk: Saturday July 13<sup>th</sup>.

Meet at 10am at the medieval bridge on Milford Mill Road. The walk will include coffee and a private tour of St Andrew's church and ruins. As numbers are limited, please book early for this event.

The ticket price is £5 person. To confirm attendance and book tickets, please contact Laura Jones: [lauraejones76@gmail.com](mailto:lauraejones76@gmail.com)

### Entrance to Porticus on North Side of Britford Church nave.



Decorations date from 700 AD