

WAREHAM WALLS WALK ~ POINT 6, EAST WALLS



BESTWALL

The area outside East Walls is known as Bestwall which means 'by the east wall'. Recently, 55 hectares of gravel has been extracted by Aggregate Industries plc. During this time archaeological excavations uncovered an enormous amount of information on how the landscape on the east side of Wareham has developed over thousands of years. The land has since been restored, leaving two freshwater lakes surrounded by grassland.



FIRST PIONEERS

Around 9000 BC, hunter-gatherers roamed the lightly-forested land, catching waterfowl, deer and fish and supplementing their diet with seasonal fruits, nuts and seeds. They made simple flint tools from the underlying gravels, leaving behind debris from their transitory hunting camps. By 2000 BC the forest had been cleared by using flint and stone axes and small rectangular fields growing wheat and barley were set out. These people were making their own pottery using locally available clay.



Hunter-gatherers living in Bestwall area

FAMILY FARMERS

Between 1700 and 900 BC family groups occupied a series of roundhouses and farmed the surrounding landscape. Grain crops and beans were grown and sheep and cattle kept, their wool and leather were used for clothes and household items and the bone was made into useful tools. Nothing was wasted. Different sized pots were used for cooking, serving and storage, and were even used for containing the cremated remains of the dead who were buried near their settlements.



Three Roman cremations were found at Bestwall, all were interred in locally made pots.

ROMAN POTTERS

By 200 AD, the Romans had established a competitive and thriving pottery industry sited near the banks of the River Frome. The kilns produced millions of black, shiny pots that were used by all levels of society and which were distributed all over Britain as well as to the continent. Production gradually ceased in the years after 410, when the Romans abandoned Britain.

CHARCOAL BURNING AND IRONWORKING

For the next 400 years, the woodland around the site was carefully managed, and oak was sought out for making into charcoal. This was used in small-scale ironworking, whereby iron ore, probably extracted from the local high-iron content heathstone rock, was first of all smelted into workable iron lumps and then forged into tools and other items.



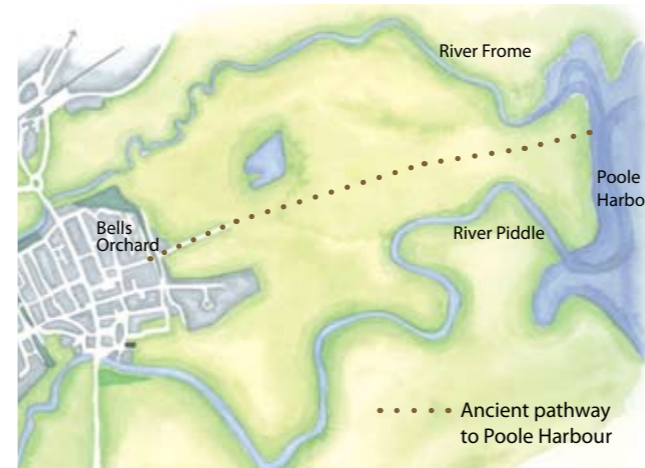
Charcoal burning in oak woods

THE NORMAN CONQUEST AND BEYOND

When the Domesday Book was compiled in 1086, Bestwall was a small, but productive manor with arable and pasture land as well as good stands of woodland. Up until 1992 when gravel extraction started, the land continued to be used for farming.

REMNANTS OF THE SAXON WALLS

When the stone wall which had been built on top of the earth ramparts was dismantled in the early Middle Ages, occasional pieces were left behind; these fragments of Purbeck stone can be seen on the present pathway on top of the East Walls.



PATHWAY TO POOLE HARBOUR

The cutting through the walls at Bell's Orchard is ancient – it was part of a pathway which led down through fields to the mouths of the Rivers Frome and Piddle, and was once the quickest way down to the harbour's edge.

OAK WOODLAND

Nearby is an area of Penunculate oak woodland with ground flora dominated by bluebells, and elsewhere you will find other woodland species such as lesser celandine, lord's-and-ladies and wood avens.

