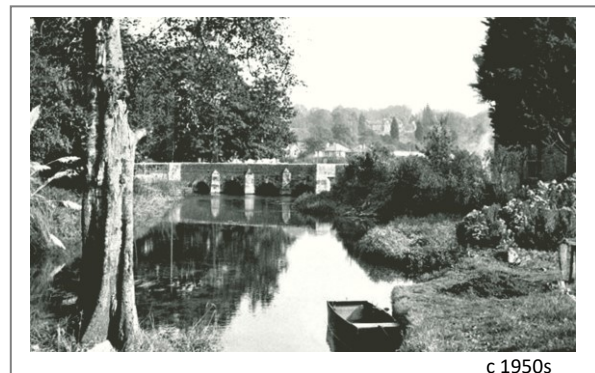




## Walford, Walford Mill & Walford Bridge

The mill is set mostly on an island surrounded by the overgrown millstream and the River Allen - formerly called the 'Winn' and the 'Wym' and therefore contributing to the varied names of the town in past times; Winburnan (899 Anglo Saxon Chronicles) Winburne (1086 Domesday Book), Wymbornemunstre [1287], Wynborn Mynster [1501], Wynburne [1539], Winbornminster [1610], Wimborne [18<sup>th</sup> C], Winbourn Minster (1868 Hutchins). A description that seems to relate to Walford Mill appears in the writings of John Leland, a librarian and antiquarian for Henry VIII, who from 1536 to 1542 undertook an antiquarian tour of England and Wales and was authorized to search cathedral and monastic libraries for manuscripts of historical interest. On his travels he wrote many descriptions of the places he visited including from Canford to Walford, that give an interesting comparison with the places we know today. The name Walford may come from 'wealt' (Old English – woodland/wild forest) and 'ford' - shallow water.

The stream water of the River Allen surrounding the mill is noticeably crystal clear, the river having collected its water on the large area of Cranborne Chase to the North of the town and is an example of the quite rare chalk streams. In fact the world has fewer than 300 chalk streams – and England has most of them. These streams occur only where chalk bedrock meets the Earth's surface making them rare - and in our case that is the area of Cranborne Chase; a large area of smooth rounded downs, deep coombes and dry valleys – all typical of a chalk landscape. Our own chalk streams are mostly found in southern England; with just a few in France - which makes them all the more special as they are a haven for well known species like the otter, kingfisher and salmon, and that's why so much effort is directed towards protecting them.



Wimborne's position at the junction of the River Allen and the much larger River Stour with its large area of floodplains surrounding the town has been the site of settlements from the iron age, although the majority of archaeological evidence is of Saxon settlements – and of course the major late medieval enlarging of the central town itself from which time the current Minster building dates. A recent archaeological survey undertaken prior to the new development on the Western side of Cranborne Road revealed the existence of a small community alongside what has been an ancient trackway - still followed by the route of the current Cranborne Road. [Piotr Orczewski et al - 2018 – Vol 139 -Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History & Archaeological Society.] Those findings would suggest that the site of the Walford Bridge is an ancient ford crossing of the River Allen (Winn / Wym) linking the early Saxon sites; the main one of the town itself and that at Walford with communities to the North. The current bridge dates from the early 1500s and was

widened in the 1700s – possibly being the first such bridge to replace the ford. However the Saxon archaeological finds North of the Allen, clearly date from before 705 AD; the date when the nunnery and the establishing of the monastic colleges in Wimborne occurred – suggesting a separate community to that of the Saxon settlement in what would become Wimborne.

The large expanse of Cranborne Chase was being settled during the Bronze and Iron ages with areas becoming farmland; and with some basic woodland management. This continued throughout the Saxon periods from 400 AD onwards and the evidence from the surveys done prior to the recent Cranbourne Road housing developments suggested an early Saxon site alongside the western side of an established northbound bridlepath was occupied around 530-670 AD through to the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, with little before that time. Pottery finds suggest that the community grew and expanded up the slope to the North and East with building areas adjacent to the ‘roadway’ - the largest structure being perhaps 7m x 5m based on the evidence of postholes discovered. Although the area to the West of the settlement was open there appears to have been a ready source of wood as shown in the finds of charcoal remains >

*“reflecting the provision of firewood from the underwood or timber offcuts of local woodlands. The assemblage includes a number of taxa which coppice well (e.g. oak, ash, alder, hazel, willow, poplar, field maple) and also taxa which, as small trees or shrubs, form an understory in mixed deciduous woodland (e.g. hazel, field maple, holly, alder buckthorn, hawthorn, apple, pear, cherry). Relatively open or marginal woodland is indicated by the presence of light-demanding taxa such as ash, birch, blackthorn and elder.”* [Piotr Orczewski et al]

As with the fate of the ‘Leaze’ to the South West of Wimborne town the arrival of the Black Death in 1348 seems to have led to the extinction of the community after almost 700 years.

The area of the current town to the south of the Walford Bridge and Walford Mill is the road known as West Borough – a straight route linking the Minster Church to the river crossing. This part of the town was formerly known as ‘The Manor of the Borough’ being then a part of the Kingston Lacy Estate and created as a borough to rival the established market of the Dean of the Minster that took place within the town itself [1236 - Popham 1980]. The new ‘Borough’ seems not to have been developed much until the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, before which records show that 140 people lived in the Manor of the Borough whilst just over 600 lived in the Manor of the Deanery – i.e. the older part of what is now Wimborne Town.



The ‘Crown & Anchor Public House by Walford Bridge – around 1900

**View more of the Trail >> <https://www.wimbornehistorytrail.uk/index.html>**

**View more on the Mill >> <https://www.wimbornehistorytrail.uk/page24.html>**