

Rivers: fish & mammals

The Severn Ham is flooded regularly by its surrounding rivers, the Severn, Avon and Swilgate. It is the silt brought down by these rivers and deposited on the Ham that gives it its rich fertility.

The rivers are fished in season for a large range of native coarse fish as well as the foreign zander. The strange lamprey inhabits these waters as do eels, although, sadly, both are declining. The Severn is one of only four English rivers up which the twaite shad (mayfish) travel to spawn. Also on their way upstream, salmon can be seen leaping the weir; in season they are fished there. On Spring nights young eels (glass eels or elvers) migrating from the sea are caught from the banks in triangular nets.

If you notice water levels quickly rising and falling, it will be the effect of high Spring tides down in the Bristol Channel! These tidal surges have brought with them the occasional seal.

Despite the floods a few foxes regularly inhabit the southern end and somehow field mice and voles survive in the grass. At the river margins, otters are slowly reclaiming their territory from the mink - so you may even see the once prolific water vole!



Brimstone butterfly



Haymaking



Redwing

Water Dropwort



Great Dodder



The weir



Elvers

Birds, bugs and plants

Birds flourish here throughout the year. The largest flocks are the overwintering redwing and fieldfare. More unusually, groups of snipe and dunlin sometimes visit in winter and flocks of shelduck and mute swans often graze when floods have just receded.

On the water coot, moorhen, mallard and tufted duck vie for attention with several gull species, whilst cormorants, which roost nearby, can be seen diving for fish. These should not be confused with the smaller great-crested grebes which also plunge dive. With great luck you may even see a kingfisher, a grey heron, a little egret or even a dipper!

Crows and rooks often perch ready to swoop on unwary young birds or take eggs, whilst sparrow hawks and kestrels sometimes patrol the river margins looking for a meal.

Waders - like redshank with their red legs and curlew with its haunting call - breed in the boggy southern segment. Reed bunting, sedge and reed warbler breed around the margins. Groups of tits, including long-tailed tits, seek insects in the trees, whilst flocks of finches including linnets search for seeds across the meadow.

You may also hear the drumming of the great spotted wood-pecker, the laughing call of the green wood-pecker and the unmistakable sounds of the cuckoo and skylark. Overhead swifts, swallows and house martins chase the myriad flying insects.

Watch out for the mayflies, whose brief lives coincide with the mayflower (flowering hawthorn) and the bright damsel flies which hover and dart along the banks in summer. Other interesting insects include the red admiral, tortoise-shell and brimstone butterflies and the iridescent dock beetle.

Spring brings carpets of pretty, pale mauve lady's smock or cuckoo flower as well as yellow celandines, followed in early summer by spectacular shows of buttercups and cow parsley. Among the many different grasses you will find lovely clovers, vetches and numerous other native plants. A controversial foreigner is the Himalayan balsam, growing by the Severn.

You may come across the interesting horseradish, which can be mistaken for dock until you smell the bruised leaves. Its roots are grated to make the famous sauce and are essential for Tewkesbury mustard.

Narrow-leaved water dropwort, an endangered species, thrives on the damp ground and the rare great dodder grows upon the nettles - just two reasons why the area is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

The Severn Ham

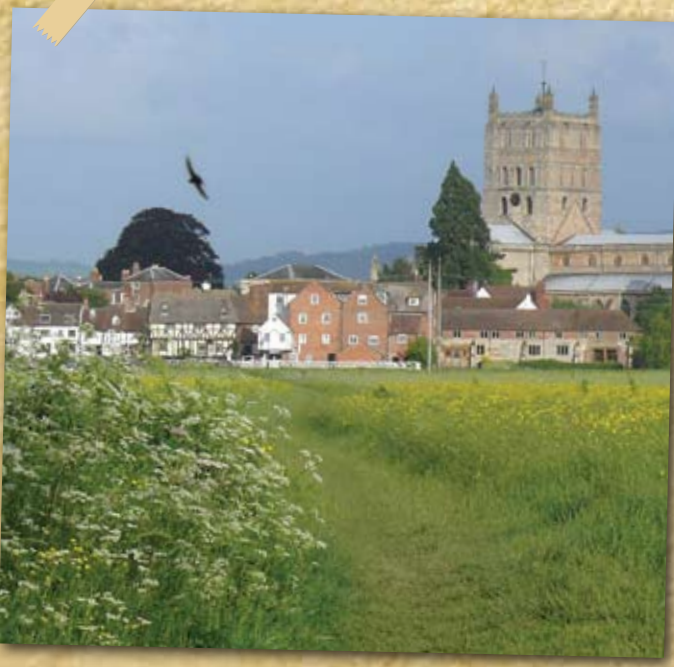
This is perhaps the finest of many 'Hams'. The name derives from the Saxon word 'ham' or 'hamm', meaning 'meadow in the bend of a river', 'water meadow', or 'flood plain'.

About a thousand years ago the Ham became an island when the Mill Avon was first dug, perhaps for the dual purposes of defence and to provide a 'leat' or water source to drive mills where the Abbey Mill now stands.

The Ham was once owned by the Abbey, then for many centuries by the local landed and political elite, whilst the town's burghers retained their ancient rights of Lammas - to graze their animals on the second crop of grass, or aftermath. This was all secured by the Inclosure act of 1808.

It is now owned by the Town Council and managed by them to strict environmental standards under a Countryside Stewardship agreement with Natural England. The grass is cut late in summer both to allow the seeds to ripen and fall after providing a nesting habitat for birds. Local farmers buy the hay and the aftermath grazing.

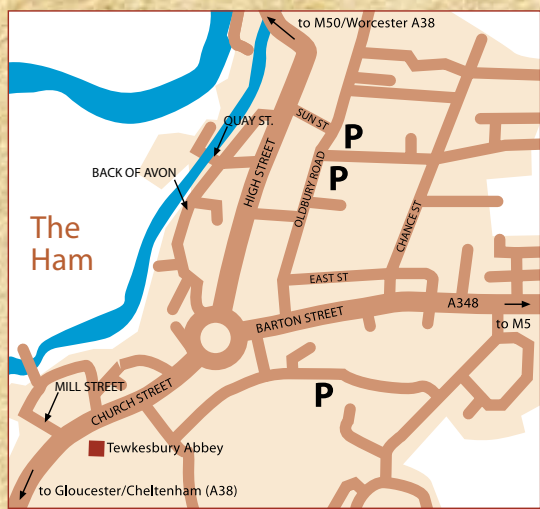
The Ham is a registered common and part of the local conservation area. Local byelaws prevent fires, camping, shooting and unauthorised vehicles.



Information

The Ham is a wonderful place to walk, explore and enjoy. After a visit to our beautiful market town you can discover this watermeadow, observe its plants, animals and husbandry whilst admiring the views; perfect for stretching your legs. Take your camera!

Access is by footbridges from The Abbey Mill at the bottom of Mill Street or near Healings Mill at the bottom of Quay Street off Back of Avon.



Please be wild-life friendly during the Spring nesting and hay growing seasons by keeping to the paths. The Ham can be very muddy at the centre after the seasonal floods - please take care.

The leaflet was produced by MAATRA
With support & funding from
Tewkesbury Town Council
Tewkesbury Borough Council (Count Me In)
Tewkesbury Printing
Tewkesbury Civic Society
Tewkesbury Rotary Club



Marketing Consultant: felicitas 07989 936270 Design: ps graphics 01603 453980

The Severn Ham Tewkesbury



Walking with Nature

