



The Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve, managed for people and wildlife.

The Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve (LNR) is a green corridor that opens the way through Ewell Court and West Ewell, to the Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames and is a remnant of meadow pasture, which was the main type of landscape for the whole of this area, not so long ago. Today the site is recognised as a Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) and is managed for both people and wildlife.

Meandering through the LNR is the Hogsmill River itself, a source of energy for the life and industry that made this place special. Once a river which powered several mills, including gunpowder mills, it is now a much smaller, but still very attractive tributary of the Thames. The Hogsmill river probably takes its name from Mr John Hog, who was an important citizen of Kingston in the 12th Century.

The Hogsmill River starts as rainfall on the chalk downs south of London. It filters through the chalk until it reaches an impermeable layer of London clay, which forces the water to the surface creating a line of springs at the foot of the downs.

To appreciate fully the history and unexpected pleasure of the river and the landscape it passes through, let us take a stroll along the full length (4km 2.5 miles), within the Borough of Epsom & Ewell. Please note, because the walk will follow the route of the river this is not a circular walk. There are optional paths along the route that will vary the sights and sounds as you

walk down and then back up the river.

Before embarking on the walk, why not enjoy the charming atmosphere of Ewell village, with its shops, pubs and restaurants. While looking at its buildings and exploring the gardens at Bourne Hall, it is not hard to imagine the area as it was many years ago when the main industry was of the mills and the Hogsmill was essential to the life of the village. There is more than one spring that feeds the river. They fill the ornamental pond at Bourne Hall and the Horse Pond opposite the Spring Tavern, where carters used to size their cart wheels and water their horses, in the days before lorries and vans. Water from these ponds flows under the road to the Upper and Lower Mill ponds whose outflow forms the start of the Hogsmill River.

To find the start of the walk from Bourne Hall Gardens:

Walk through the gardens of Bourne Hall and find the gates, beyond the pond, which let you out onto the Chessington Road. Cross the Road, turn right and walk along the pavement towards the traffic lights. On you're left just before the traffic lights you will see a path; this is where we will begin our walk.



The pond on your left is the Upper Mill pond. Once the head of water that powered the water wheels for the mills. Now it forms an attractive water feature and a home for

ducks, coots and geese. The water flow is controlled by weirs and gates. After a short distance the path meets the entrance to the Upper Mill, turn left toward the mill and then right to find the bankside path which follows the Lower Mill Pond on your right. The building with its typical white wooden weather boarding was a flour mill originally built in the 18th Century and was rebuilt in the late 20th century as offices. It is probably on the site of one of two much older flour mills mentioned in the Domesday Book, valued at five shillings each. The increasing need for water from a rising population and the replacement of farmland with roads and buildings significantly reduced the flow of the Hogsmill River. At one time three pairs of millstones could be run indefinitely, with one in reserve at any one time. However by 1953, it was only possible to run one at a time. The mill was last worked in May 1953. The water channels surrounding the building are original and were part of the water control system for the old mill.

The path takes us through an attractively wooded garden towards the site of another former flour mill the Lower Mill. By the 20th century flour milling had ceased at the Lower Mill and in 1929, it was leased to Turnell and Wainwright who made garden furniture. Half of the mill burned down in 1938. The house was saved and later sold to the Sutton and District Water Company. Today most of this site has been re-built as offices.



The 19th Century pre-Raphaelite painter, John Everett Milais, painted his famous "Ophelia", who

is actually depicted in the Hogsmill not far from here near Old Malden lane. A rather sad picture, however the detail is so fine, it is almost photographic and truly conveys the beauty of the willow-lined banks.

Continuing along the path we come to a narrow footbridge. Here it is possible to deviate from the Hogsmill and stroll along the Bonesgate Stream, which forms part of the path leading from the Thames at Kingston to the North Downs. Its tree lined edges and scrubby margins support an abundance of bird and butterfly life. The name Bonesgate is thought to refer to a nearby burial pit where victims of the Great Plague of London were buried in 1665-66.

If we do not cross, but continue along the footpath, we soon meet the busy Kingston Road and a bridge, built in 1939, which crosses the Hogsmill. Here the river forms the boundary between Surrey and Greater London. If we cross with care at the lights, there is an entrance to a continuation of the path leading all the way to the Thames at Kingston. We are not going to follow this path, instead we will walk along Worcester Park Road. The pavement takes us beside a belt of trees, along the bank of the Hogsmill from the Ewell By-Pass, to the entrance drive of the sports fields, opposite the Hogsmill pub. Just a little way down the river from this point, another pre-Raphaelite painter and friend of John Everett Milais, Holman Hunt, chose to set his model against what was, curiously enough, one of the

disused huts of the Gunpowder Mills that were there. He depicted Jesus knocking at the door, in the painting "The Light of the World". It was the end of the world for the many workers who lost their lives in accidents while milling the powder at this once important site.



The records of accidents have given us most of our information about these mills and those higher up the river at Ewell. The mills were built in 1720 by William Taylor and probably ceased production around 1865. Between 1771 and 1772, the famous engineer, John Smeaton was commissioned to design a new style of steam heated stove and water powered incorporating mill. The Gunpowder Mill was eventually replaced, in 1874, by a Flour Mill, which burned down in 1891 and the site was then re-developed for other industries.

Here our walk ends, as the river continues on out of the Borough of Epsom & Ewell, and through the Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames to the river Thames. Before returning along the same route, why not rest for a while at the Hogsmill Pub, across the road? A chance to take in the history of the river and picture the world of the mills, and the romantic artists, who realised they had discovered a place of particular natural beauty.

For more information:

Please phone Epsom & Ewell Borough Council on: 01372 732000 or write to: The Countryside Team, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom KT18 5BY or email: contact@epsom-ewell.gov.uk or visit: www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk



The Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve

A self-guided tour



Managed for people
and wildlife



The Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve, managed for people and wildlife.

However, if you look round to the far side of the property, the exterior of the old mill has been retained. It was built in the 18th Century and was last owned by the Henderson family who at one time also owned the Upper Mill.

Continue along the path and go through the tunnel under the railway, ahead you will see a weir and a gauge to monitor the river's flow. The steady flow of the river has decreased significantly since the days of the mills due to modern development, which also causes the river level to rise rapidly in wet weather, as water runs off all the hard man made surfaces. The slower, shallower Hogsmill allows the colonisation of a much greater diversity of plant and animal life. The green algae and water weeds provide a haven for many invertebrates and amphibians.

After you emerge from the tunnel, (mind your head on the low pipe!) turn left and walk up the path, at the top of the slope take the path to your right. After about 50m look left and you will see perhaps the most magnificent Oak tree in the Borough, many hundreds of years old it is a remnant of the areas rural past. Before you reach the gate at the end of Green Lanes follow the path to the right which leads over the bridge and in to Chamber Mead.

You have just crossed a stream that rises on Epsom Common and flows along Longmead Road and Green Lanes before joining the Hogsmill River. Continue straight ahead from the bridge through Chamber Mead. Soon you will come to a junction bear right towards the stepping stones 3 a popular spot where you will often find

children paddling in the river. Turn left by the Cllr Derek Phillips Memorial Bench and continue along the path beside the river on your right. Derek Phillips had a great interest in the Hogsmill River and he made a short film charting its course from Ewell Village to the Thames at Kingston. The film is available on DVD from the Bourne Hall Museum shop.

The path takes us through a wooded area. Here it is rich in woodland wildlife, which is shrouded by some very mature oak trees. Some have fallen and these provide a fantastic deadwood habitat for beetles and other insects, and the birds that feed on them. Soon you will come to a junction with a bridge to your right, keep going straight ahead with the river on your right. Soon on your left you will see the King George V's Recreation Ground (also known as Poole Rd rec.) 4

When we come to the head of the path we find ourselves next to a fence with the play park, on our left, and a surfaced path in front of us leading left and right. Here we have a choice of two deviations from our general route along the river.

If we turn left and follow the path to the entrance of the park, we can take a circular stroll around the sports fields of King George V Recreation Ground. A line of impressive old Oak trees, just inside the park, marks the field boundary from when the land was farm pasture, long before the houses of Crosslands Road were built. Most of the straight lines of trees along this walk will be the original boundaries of old fields. If they are not the original trees, they will tend to have been planted

along the same line. Right round the far side of the Recreation Grounds, beside the road leading to the pavilion, a sandstone edge-runner (a type of millstone) has been set on a plinth and preserves forever a very small part of the workings of the Gunpowder Mills that once growled and droned at the nearby mill.

The second family to run the Powder Mills, the Sharpes, lived in the large house to the north of the Hogsmill LNR. Then known as Avenue House, it is now called Ewell Court House. 5

Retrace your steps out of the recreation ground and along the path, continue over the footbridge then go through the gates to the right. The whole garden of Ewell Court House has been re-landscaped to form a peaceful ornamental park, with pond and stream. The House itself has a public library and is now hired out for wedding receptions and evening classes. Next to the house you will find a Victorian feature, an artificial grotto that was built as a fernery. Originally it would have been enclosed as part of a glass conservatory. Around the back in the old kitchen garden is a tea room and garden centre.

The pond at Ewell Court Gardens is very well populated with waterfowl, including Canada geese, mallards, moorhens and coots. Tufted duck breed

over winter here and a grey heron can usually be seen fishing from the island. (If you want to feed water birds please avoid using dry white bread as this is difficult for them to digest and excess bread will attract rats. Bird seed can be purchased from the garden centre and tea room).

Coming back out of Ewell Court Gardens, we may resume our original walk along the Hogsmill by following the hard-surfaced path towards Ruxley Lane. We enter a wide stretch of old meadow and pasture land 6 that was traditionally grown for hay or grazed by cattle. Today the grass is cut by mowers whilst maintaining good woodland edge habitat around numerous small copses. This is excellent for most of our more familiar wild neighbours such as the chaffinch, blackbird, field mouse, fox and magpie. You may spot the more colourful goldfinch and in winter, redwings. Woodland edge also provides shelter for butterflies such as the red admiral, the peacock and members of the brown family. Nettles and thistles in particular are a valuable food plant for their caterpillars. There are a great variety of trees along

here, like birch, oak, ash, maple and in abundance within the copses, the much bushier elder.

From about 1754 to 1875, on this part of the river, much of this site was occupied by a Gunpowder Mill complex. At its height, in the mid-nineteenth century, it employed 156 men. It was opened by Alexander Bridges and Jonathan Eade. Two subsequent generations of Bridges operated the concern until the death of Sir Henry Bridges in 1861. The mills were then leased to John Carr

Sharpe, who ran them with partners, until new restrictions on production under the Explosives Act of 1875 probably made them uneconomic. The gun-powder from Ewell was said to have been used in the American Civil War (1861-5), but it could not have been well trusted for

its quality as it was later blamed by some for the French losing the Franco-German War of 1870.

Further downstream we meet Ruxley Lane. Cross the road carefully. On the other side of the road, you may like to look back

and then glance at the picture of Ruxley Splash, on the front cover of this leaflet, and reflect upon how this crossing looked at the turn of the 20th century. The neat little ford and footbridge had to make way for a modern bridge as the lane became a busy main road with the advance of the motor car.

Great willows follow along the river on both banks from Ruxley Lane. At the bank, between these trees, you may be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of the gloriously colourful but timid

kingfisher, as it perches on a low branch, waiting for its opportunity to dart for a fish. If we continue on this side of the river, we find ourselves in an open, grassy area, near the Curtis Road playground. The informal parkland is old grazing pasture. A hint of how it was evoked by the peaceful open nature of these fields, with the occasional cluster of scrub and trees and the old willows bowing over the stream.

