



HAVERSHAM SAILING CLUB

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Haversham Sailing Club is accessed down a short drive from the old village of Haversham. *The club and lake are private property and is open only to members.* For villagers, there are a limited number of annual 'walking licenses' available and the club holds an Annual Open Day. The village is in two parts, the old part seen from the lake and approaches and the newer estate nearer Wolverton. Haversham Parish has the spectacular Haversham Viaduct with 6 elliptical brick arches viaduct, built c.1838 carrying the main West Coast Railway Line, London to Manchester railway over the *River Great Ouse*. Lace used to be made in the village and a wide variety of craft work is still undertaken in the community.

St Mary's Church is worth making the short walk back out from the club turning left through the village, past The Greyhound pub. It is on high ground, in a quiet corner, built of local jurassic limestone and dating back to the 11th century. There is a Norman window in the west wall, with the typical zigzag decoration, best seen from inside the battlemented tower that is visible from the lake. The church repays a close look. There is an hour glass on the pulpit to time the sermons, two small sundials engraved on the outside, for the use of parishioners (there is no clock), a skeleton brass, stained glass of various periods and an interesting feature called a 'hagioscope', a shaft in the wall facing the altar through which lepers could peep from the outside of the church. The churchyard has some very fine trees notably yews and a row of very old Hornbeams.

Between the church and lake lie the remains of an interesting medieval manorial complex; documents dated 1273 list a manor house, dovecote, fishponds, gardens and vineyard. The original manor house has disappeared and a 17th century manor (farm) built further up the hill.

The Lakeside

From the car park, head towards the lake and make your way through the steel gate heading south. Trees to look out for include:

- Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) with catkins and cones seen in winter.
- Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) with typical bunches of keys retained through winter.
- Dogwood (*Cornus*) with red stems (in car park).
- Crack Willow (*Salix fragilis*) pollarded or cut to provide 'withies'.
- Goat Willow ('pussy willow') smaller, along ditches and riverside.
- White willow and Elder.

You will pass two 'starting huts' before you get to a slightly wider area of grass with views off to the right (west) of the Old Rectory, a large brick house dating back to the 18th century. Look carefully over the fence to view the remains of the ancient Fishponds and a Moat for keeping and harvesting fish throughout the year. The ruins beside the moat are of later agricultural buildings. You should also be able to see the large Dovecote in the upper manor garden. The present building is a reconstruction of the medieval original, and is dated 1665. It was constructed by Maurice Thompson, Lord of the Manor. It is square, of stone, with pyramidal tiled roof with an oak lantern in the middle. 'M.T.' inscribed in a panel in the north wall. Inside, the walls are lined with 'cots' or niches for doves to nest, providing a source of food for the Manor in the winter months. The area of the lake at this point is known to club members as *Church Bay*.

There are several stainless steel 'benches' around the lake. These were donated to the club and are some of the earliest of their type designed specifically for Milton Keynes City Centre.

Lakeside flora – DO NOT PICK!

Soft rush (*Juncus effusus*) – glossy green, grasslike bunches, growing along the edge of the water. Common reed (Phragmites) – taller, up to 4 or 5 feet, pale straw colour in winter with distinctive feathery plumes waving in the wind. Water dock – tall with large leaves, and reddish flower stems. Teasels – in meadow land, tall with thistle-like flower/seed heads, formerly used to brush the nap of cloth Mullein (*Verbascum*) tall spikes of attractive yellow flowers ... and growing

in the grass: 'Ground Ivy' (*Glechoma hederacea*) with small heart-shaped leaves, smelling minty with purple flowers. The list below was compiled by HSC members and the Milton Keynes Natural History Society in August 2021.

- Bindweed *Calystegia* spp.
- Bittersweet *Solanum dulcamara*
- Bristly Ox-tongue *Picris echioides*
- Creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense*
- Great willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum*
- Ground ivy *Glechoma hederacea*
- Gypsywort *Lycopus europaeus*
- Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*
- Marsh Mallow *Althaea officinalis* (scarce)
- Marsh woundwort *Stachys palustris*
- Meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*
- Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*
- Orange balsam *Impatiens capensis*
- Oxford ragwort *Senecio squalidus*
- Purple loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*
- Silverweed *Potentilla anserina*
- Spear thistle *Cirsium vulgare*
- Teasel *Dipsacus fullonum*
- Tufted vetch *Vicia cracca*
- Upright Hedge parsley *Torilis japonica*
- Water forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides*
- Water mint *Mentha aquatica*
- Wild angelica *Angelica sylvestris*
- Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*

At the south end of the lake the club owned land flattens and the field-ground landscape is subtly different. The marshy tussock grass is home in winter to the common snipe (maybe also jack snipe) and in the very early days of the club skylarks were seen. A few years ago, the club dug out a 'scrape' (pond) which is intended to help attract dipping, wading types of bird and dragonflies. Some grasses, sedges and rushes can be found:

- Tufted Hair grass *Deschampsia caespitosa*
- Timothy *Phleum pratense*
- 'Bulrush' *Typha latifolia*
- Reed sweet grass *Glyceria maxima*
- Soft rush *Juncus effuses*
- False Fox Sedge *Carex otrubae*
- Jointed rush *Juncus articulatus*

As you walk further round you will see two poles and boxes that have attracted breeding barn owls. The owl boxes were erected by the 'Hawk and Owl Trust' as part of a project to introduce suitable nest sites along our area of the Ouse Valley. The club helps support this worthy effort. This area around the river should provide suitable unmanaged grass areas for voles and the like that the owls find very tasty. The boxes are put up in pairs as kestrels frequently also use them. Hawks also visit closer to the clubhouse and a favourite resting place on a quiet autumn evening is the top of a dinghy mast! Otters (who are very shy) are naturally re-colonising the river and at the far north of the lake land has been fenced off to protect a hand-built otter home with pipe entrance from the river. Mink are also around and can be very bold and have been known to walk very close to fishermen.

As you turn the corner and head back north, the *River Great Ouse* runs alongside (and floods occasionally across into the lake). The river used to be navigable beyond here – certainly as far as Stony Stratford, if not further, perhaps to Buckingham. The river diverts around a small island that is very wild and is left virtually unattended. The riverside may also be used for fishing, as can the lake, and the club has a small fishing syndicate who are full members of the sailing club.

Haversham Lake is an old gravel pit, the gravel being used for the building of the M1 motorway. Earlier gravel workings also took place across the river, east towards Stanton Low – now only recognisable from old maps. The village was destroyed by the gravel workings in the 1950s. All that is left above ground of the former village of Stanton Low is St Peter's Church (ruins of), Stantonbury which is very interesting archaeologically. Despite being one of the newer parks in Milton Keynes, Stanton Low is rich in heritage. The Stanton Low Park (Parks Trust, Milton Keynes) is just a short walk away from Great Linford Manor Park. The area offers lovely views across the valley of the River Great Ouse. It is well worth going to have a look from the other side. There is free public parking in the south west corner of the park off the Newport Road next to the Oakridge Park Local Centre (no access from the housing estate). There was a bridge when the gravel from *Haversham Lake* was being excavated but only the old buttresses remain.

The contemporary bridge ruins though do indicate the location of the Romano-British settlement and wharf that lay right here on the bank. What can be seen is the ruined church although only part of the walls of the Norman nave survive in place, its 12th century chancel arch being removed to St. James, New Bradwell. An underground tunnel runs to the north – the whole of this part of the county has a number of 'secret' tunnels from churches. When you are over on the other side you will also see a level platform and earthworks to the south west of the church that marks the position of the former manor house and its gardens, dating from around 1660. The village was depopulated between 1487-1516, villagers forced out by a landowner who changed the land from arable to pasture. As you get towards the north end of the lake with views across to the clubhouse and dinghy park areas, look across the river and see *Stantonbury Lake*. This was also a worked-out gravel pit, but now a wildfowl reserve, with educational study centre – the Linford Lakes Nature Reserve (Parks Trust)

Birds

Haversham Lake is lucky to get many of the migrating birds that home-in to the *Stantonbury Wildfowl Lake*. Obviously sailing activities at HSC keeps this number down somewhat but we have had over 150 swans at one time! The lake is maturing nicely with the reeds around the shallow edges still spreading. The reeds have nesting coot and reed and sedge warblers. The author has seen whitethroats. The clusters of trees around the lake host more than a dozen nest boxes and have been very successful in attracting blue and great tits. The lake is fairly shallow and does not attract too many cormorants.

Hérons can normally be seen both watching you sail or walk by, and, in flight. In a cold winter the lake can freeze and leave a small patch of open water kept open by the activity of the birds. This leads to a large number of them in a small space which will contain various species of wintering duck most commonly wigeon, tufted, goldeneye, goosander, mallard, pochard and crested grebe (the grebes also nest on the lake). It is a good time to appreciate the different species and look for rare visitors. Late March sees the early arrival of sand martins showing that spring is on its way followed by swallows and house martins in very early April. The trees along the back of the dinghy park become alive to the sound of willow warblers at around the same time. The swifts arrive in May. Keep your eyes skywards and you may see hobbies who are a rare member of the falcon family that are migrant and arrive in May. They are the size of a kestrel and on a sunny day can be seen hawking, catching insects in the wing in their talons and eating them while still airborne. Summer sees the noisy common terns over the lake on fishing sorties from their nests in the reserve or resting on the safety boat or sailing marks. If you see a tern with a slightly shorter beak and with no black at the end of it then you have been lucky to see an Arctic Tern, a rarer bird in this part of the country. Another other bird of particular note is the green woodpecker that is frequently heard laughing but seldom seen.

The below birds were seen (or heard!) on a walk around by HSC members and a group of members of the Milton Keynes Natural History Society in August 2021. *Many ears and eyes and experts!*

- Black-headed Gull
- Buzzard
- Canada Geese 17
- Common Tern 3
- Coot 17
- Cormorants 2
- Great-crested Grebe (2 juveniles) 4
- Green Sandpiper
- Green Woodpecker
- Grey Heron
- Greylag 3

- Lapwing 53
- Little Egret 3
- Mute Swan (4 cygnets) 6
- Peregrine Falcon
- Reed Bunting
- Rook
- Sparrowhawk
- Starlings 41
- Stock Dove
- Swallow (Possibly 20 or more in large flock at dusk)
- Swift 5

Views you may have missed

To the south: *Bradwell Windmill* – a stone-built tower mill constructed around 1815, on high ground close to the wharf on the Canal, a famous Milton Keynes landmark. From the south one can see across the River Ouse towards the Joan's Piece Woods, planted in 1987 by Woodland Trust volunteers. The woods border the Grand Union Canal. In a south-east direction you can see the wooded skyline of Milton Keynes – this is the ancient Linford Wood, with the main city telecommunications tower beside it.

I would like to thank especially: Harry Appleyard, Mary Sarre (RIP) and Ian Howett for their help in preparing this article.

Please also have a look at: [Haversham Lake Nature Survey, May 2024](#) in the Member's Area

I hope you have enjoyed your walk – now for a cuppa in the clubhouse – or even something stronger!

John Hunt (revised July 2024)

HSC Webmaster, ex Mudeford Sailing Club, ex Laser Sailor, ex Commodore OU Sailing Club, claim to fame – sailed Canada One, an Americas Cup Yacht in St Maarten, Caribbean!