

# SEVERN PROJECT

## Fishing on the Severn Estuary 3 – Eels and Lamprey



**Sources:** This lesson looks at eel and lamprey fishing on the River Severn. It uses photographs from Gloucestershire Archives collections reference D4764/4/31 and D10452.

**Background information:** The Severn was renowned as a source of eels and lamprey and they have been caught on a commercial scale since medieval times.

**Photograph 1** - Elvering: Elvers are baby eels that are caught as they migrate upstream from the sea on large tides in the spring. Elvering takes place at night on the river from Tewkesbury to Rodley with fishermen using a net with a fine mesh. Elvers were once an important spring time food source for Gloucestershire inhabitants, especially the lower classes. By the mid-1800s numbers were decreasing and laws were introduced to try and conserve stocks. This created much local unrest and many local fishermen were sent to prison for continuing to fish. Today elver fishing is highly regulated and the price of eels has soared to around £15 a kilo. Most are exported to Japan and Europe, but some are used for restocking.

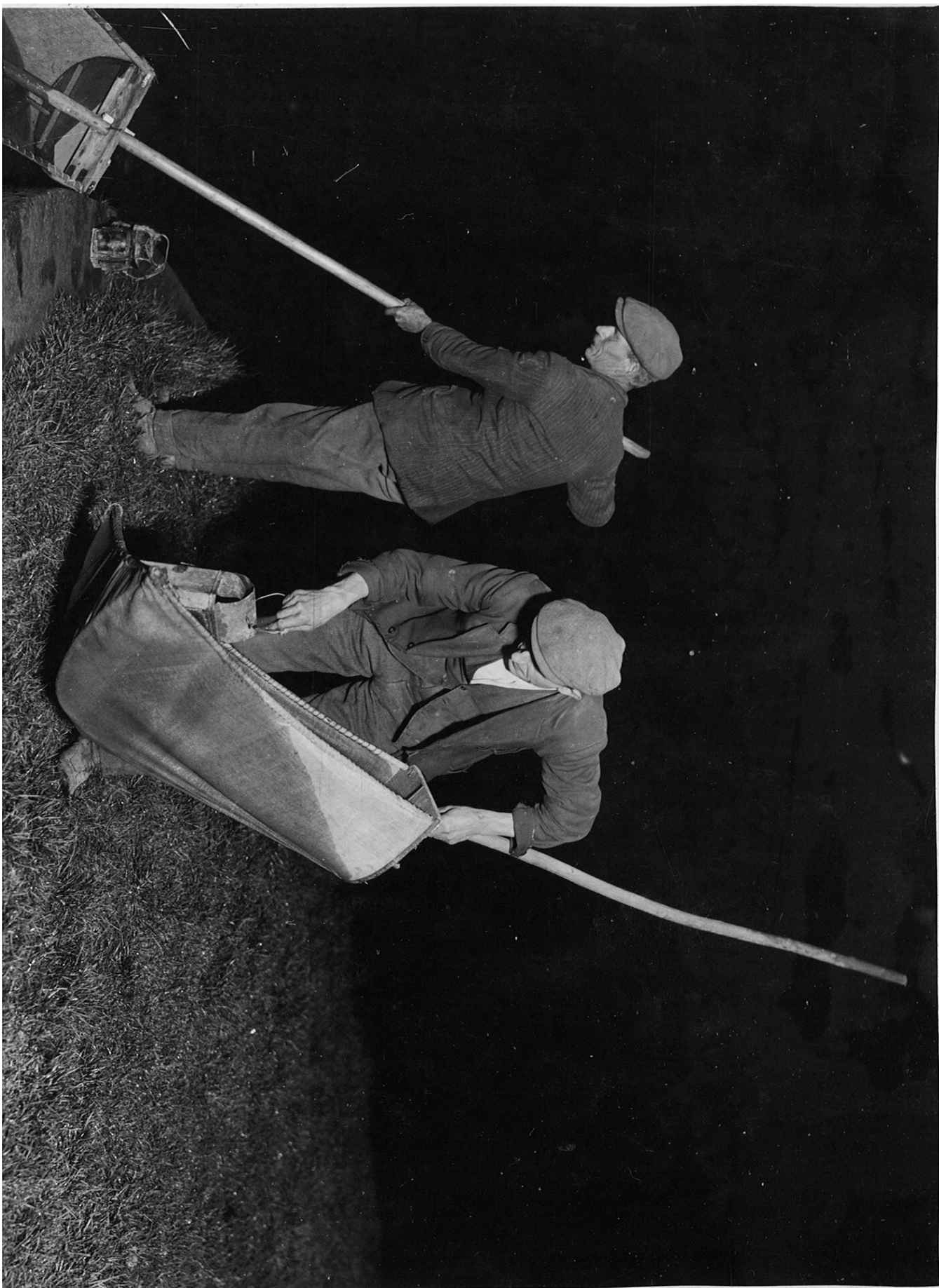
**Photograph 2** - A fisherman at Apperley with two eel weels: Adult eels were also fished for on the Severn along with lamprey. There are two main species of lampreys in the Severn, the Sea lamprey and the smaller River lamprey. Both migrated to and from salt water, but did not follow such a predictable pattern as the eel. Lampreys were a highly prized fish, especially favoured by Royalty and typically cost over £1 each (around £500 in today's money). King John once fined Gloucester the sum of 40 Marks (£26 around £13,000) for failing to send him some lampreys and Henry III is said to have died having eaten a 'surfeit of lampreys'. Lampreys were usually eaten in pies.

Adult eels and lampreys were caught in traps called 'weels' that resembled the putcheons used on the lower reaches of the estuary. They were also constructed in the same way, using willow and hazel withies, but with an inner ring of inward pointing sticks that prevented any fish caught in the trap from escaping. These traps were placed in the river along the riverbanks and secured by stakes. Often more than one fish would be caught in a trap.



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Photograph 1 - Elvering on the Severn at night



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**Photograph 2 - Fisherman with eel and lamprey traps**



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**Learning Outcomes** - To know that a historian asks questions such as who, what, when, why, where, how, to discover information from a source . To discover what historical information can be learnt from a photograph. To be able to interpret information from a photograph in a range of ways. To be able to chronologically order a sequence of events.

Pose a series of questions to elicit investigation and discovery of the facts: What is happening? Who are the men? What are the objects in the picture? What is their purpose? What are they made from? Was it in the present or the past?

**Dramatic interpretation:** How do you think the men use the objects? Who are they? Where are they going? Where do you think it took place? What are the men thinking about? Who else might have been there? Are they happy?

## Children could:

- Draw a story board of the sequence of events for all the fishing techniques.
- Imagine what it was like to work on these traps – think about what you might see, feel or hear. Act out the various methods.
- Think about what would happen if the traps caught no fish? What if they caught a lot of fish? How might this affect the man's future or his family?
- What might have happened when laws to conserve fish stocks were imposed? What might the fishing communities have done to make a living?
- Creatively improvise these situations.

## Curriculum links: KS2

**Historical, geographical and social understanding:** Essential knowledge 1b, 1c, 1d; Key Skills 2a, 2c, 2d; Cross-curricular studies 3a, 3b, 3c; Breadth of learning 4a1, 4b4, 4c2, 4d2, 4d3, 4d4; Curriculum progression M1, M4, M6, M7, M10;

**Understanding the arts:** Essential knowledge 1a, 1b, 1c; Key Skills 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d; Cross-curricular studies 3b, 3c; Breadth of learning 4a1, 4a3, 4a5, 4c1, 4c3, 4c4, 4d1, 4d2; Curriculum progression M1, M2, M3, M4, M6, M7, M8, M9;

**Links with:** Understanding English, communication and languages; Understanding physical development, health and well being.

**A&DT:** Look at the photographs from a composition point-of-view. Are they good photographs? What would improve them? Would they be better in colour? Discuss the technology being used in both capturing the image and the fishing techniques.

## Children could:

- Recreate the pictures in colour, using everyday colours but also unusual ones.
- Recreate the picture in different ways: i.e. collage, paint, charcoal, pastels.
- Make models of the nets and traps being used.
- Try to make nets and traps. Research the techniques using the Internet.

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- Think about the technology being used. Would modern materials be better suited? What advantages or disadvantages would there be?
- Many fish caught in the Severn were smoked to preserve them and several smokehouses still survive on the river (i.e. at Minsterworth). Investigate how these structures work. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this and other methods of preserving fish and food.

## Curriculum links KS2:

**Historical, geographical and social understanding:** Essential knowledge 1a, 1c; Key Skills 2a, 2c, 2d; Cross-curricular studies 3b, 3c; Breadth of learning 4a1, 4d4; Curriculum progression M1, M10, M10;.

**Understanding the arts:** Essential knowledge 1a, 1 b, 1c, 1d; Key Skills 2a, 2b, 2c; Cross-curricular studies 3a, 3b, 3c; Breadth of learning 4a1, 4a2, 4a3, 4b1; Curriculum progression M1, M2, M3.

**Scientific and technological understanding:** Key skills 1a, 1c, 1d, 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d; Cross-curricular studies 3b, 3c; Breadth of learning 4a1, 4b1, 4b2, 4b3, 4b4, 4c1, 4c2, 4c3, 4d1, 4d2,; Curriculum progression M1, M2, M3, M4, M5, M10, M12.

**Links with:** Understanding English, communication and languages; Understanding physical development, health and well being; Mathematical understanding.

**Citizenship:** Why are there only men in the pictures? Where might the women be? Would women have a role in this type of industry? Are these men wealthy or poor? What is their social class? None of these jobs survive commercially today – why not?

## Children could:

- Research the decline in the fishing industry. What changes have created this situation?
- Look at the different ways that people catch fish around the world. What might happen in the future?
- Research the sorts of jobs and industry behind this scene:
- Fishing gear – Forestry, net-making, metal working.
- Men - cloth making, tanning, shoe-making, metal working (belt buckles, buttons), clothing industry, hat-making.

## Curriculum links KS2:

**Historical, geographical and social understanding:** Essential knowledge 1a,1b, 1c; 1d; Key Skills 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d; Cross-curricular studies 3b, 3c; Breadth of learning 4a1, 4b4, 4c2, 4d1, 4d2, 4d3, 4d4; Curriculum progression M1, M4, M5, M7, M9, M10.

**Links with:** Understanding English, communication and languages; Understanding physical development, health and well being.