



# Out of hours **365**

Leisure, travel, charity events, social gatherings; the Island's business community with their suits off.

Witley Court.



## WONDERFUL

# WORCESTERSHIRE

Simon Richardson boards the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company fast craft Manannan and heads for the rural delights of picturesque Worcestershire...

“ The Manor Arms is situated in the heart of some spectacular walking country.



With the summer all but gone and the prospect of a long winter ahead what better way of charging up our batteries for the long, cold nights and gloomy days of winter than a fabulous long-weekend away?

Fed up with the hassle of airport protocol, draconian baggage restrictions and the seemingly ever-present threat of disruptive sea mist, we loaded up the car and boarded the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company's fast craft Manannan in Douglas en route for a few days in rural Worcestershire.

A pleasant 2 hours 45 minutes after boarding in Douglas we disembarked in Liverpool and headed for the open road, and our base at the lovely Manor Arms in the picturesque rural hamlet of Abberley.

Worcestershire is one of those counties that hides its considerable light under a bushel. It's a beautiful, rural retreat characterised by rolling hills, idyllic country pubs and some of the nicest towns and

villages in the country. Part of its problem is that it's on the 'A' road route to the Cotswolds and people simply pass through. Well, save yourself some petrol and throw out the anchor in Worcestershire and the West Midlands. You'll find all the charm and beauty of its illustrious neighbour further south, but none of the crowds!

Another significant advantage of this part of the world is its easy access from Liverpool. There's no need to endure the white knuckle ride on the M6, when access by A roads through beautiful Cheshire and Shropshire can have you there in under three hours relaxed, stress-free and ready to unwind and embrace the rural lifestyle.

The Manor Arms is situated in the heart of some spectacular walking country; the famous Worcestershire Way passes its door.

It's a warm, welcoming retreat that offers everything you might expect from an AA five star country gastro pub. Our spacious, well-equipped room



LEFT: Baroque splendour at Great Witley Church.

BELOW: Witley Court fountain.



looked out over the well-tended gardens, with their extended deck area with chairs and tables overlooking the idyllic rolling hills and green pastures of the region.

If wildlife is your thing, Abberely and its neighbouring villages are a genuine hotspot. From majestic Red Kites circling above in search of prey to Badgers, Wild Deer and squirrels – the chances are you will see them all.

The Manor Arms is a perfect base to explore the area. The building dates back to the 17th century, and following its most recent re-furb in 2013 still retains its old world charm, offering six excellent en-suite guest rooms, an atmospheric bar and lovely restaurant.

In the kitchen, celebrated head chef, Stuart Forman has featured in popular publications such as the Great British Cookbook, the Great British Chefs Cookbook, and has won the National Breakfast Awards for the last seven years. He is a regular at Ludlow Food Festival, giving cooking demonstrations.

His bright, fresh modern British cooking style brings diners from far and wide: "The Manor is a

fantastic pub with a beautiful garden that attracts locals and visitors from all over the UK. Our menu includes pub classics for those who want a simple supper, and more elaborate, gastro pub dishes for those who want a gourmet meal," explained Stuart.

The pub also offers an excellent afternoon tea with a selection of irresistible home made cakes.

If you can tear yourself away from the delights of The Manor the area has much to enjoy - all within easy driving distances. Just three miles away in Great Witley is the breathtaking shell of Witley Court. It's a ruined Italianate mansion. Built for the wealthy Foley family in the seventeenth century, it was massively expanded in the early nineteenth century by the architect John Nash. Subsequently, sold to the Earls of Dudley, a second massive reconstruction by the architect



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Manor Arms head chef Stuart Forman.



Picturesque  
Bewdley.



Air raid shelter,  
Bewdley.

Samuel Daukes took place in the mid nineteenth century, creating one of the great pleasure palaces of Victorian and Edwardian England.

The declining fortune of the Dudleys saw the sale of the court after the First World War to a Kidderminster carpet manufacturer. In 1937 a major fire caused great damage to the court, the estate was broken up and sold and the house was subsequently stripped of its fittings and furnishings. Forty years of decay followed before the house and grounds were taken into the care of The Department of the Environment in 1972. Since that point, significant restoration and stabilisation have secured the house as a spectacular ruin (source Wikipedia).

Another short drive takes you to the elegant, Georgian town of Bewdley, which straddles the River Severn. Situated in

the Wyre Forest district Bewdley exudes charm and elegance. Attractions include an excellent museum set in lovely gardens, abundant river walks, canoeing on the river, plenty of independent shops, restaurants and riverside cafes, and the Severn Valley Historic Railway runs from the town.

If you crave the hustle and bustle of the big city then Worcester, with its magnificent cathedral and huge selection of shops and eateries is no more than 30 minutes from any of the towns and villages that surround your base at Abberley. Meanwhile Birmingham is under 30 miles distant.

With your own car you have total freedom to go where you please and do what you like. What's more you can load up with all sorts of goodies ahead of the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company sailing home, without the stress of weight limits!

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## Fact Box

**TRAVEL:** Isle of Man Steam Packet Company fast craft to Liverpool (two people and car taking advantage of the five day break offer).

[www.steam-packet.com](http://www.steam-packet.com)



**ACCOMMODATION:** The 17th century Manor Arms, Abberley (AA 5 star), Worcestershire. Dinner, bed and breakfast from £155. B&B from £105.

Phone: 01299 890300

Email:  
[enquiries@themanorarms.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@themanorarms.co.uk)

Website:  
[www.themanorarms.co.uk](http://www.themanorarms.co.uk)

