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Guide to Rural England

OXFORDSHIRE



WHERE TO GO | WHAT TO SEE | WHAT TO DO
WHERE TO STAY | WHERE TO EAT | WHERE TO BUY

Fully illustrated with detailed directions and maps

LOCATOR MAP



Oxfordshire

Oxfordshire is a county covering about 1000 square miles, contained largely within the Thames Basin. Between Henley and Wallingford lie the beginnings of the Chiltern Hills, while in the north are the most easterly hills of the Cotswolds as well as rich farmland based on the clay soil that stretches up from Oxford to the Midlands. In the east, Henley is one of many attractive Thames-side settlements, towards the west are Faringdon and Witney, and in the north, Bicester, Chipping Norton and Banbury. The county is of course dominated by its capital, Oxford, which from the 12th century grew from a small and little known market town into one of the major seats of learning in the world. It also prospered as a central point of communication, first as a stopping point on





coaching routes and later with the coming of the canals and the railways. Industry grew, too, and in the suburb of Cowley, Lord Nuffield's Morris car works were a major employer. Many palaeolithic, mesolithic and neolithic finds have been made in the county, but the most eye-catching early archaeological feature is the Uffington White Horse from the Iron Age. Dorchester and Alchester were the most important sites in Roman Oxfordshire, the Saxons built many settlements along the Thames, and the Danes over-ran the area in the 10th and 11th centuries. The county was heavily involved in the Civil War (1642-1651) and the towns of Oxford (for three years the Royalist headquarters), Banbury and Wallingford were all besieged by Parliamentary forces during the conflict.

Towns and Villages

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Henley-on-Thames

-  Greys Court  River & Rowing Museum
-  Fawley Court Museum  Regatta

Reputed to be the oldest settlement in Oxfordshire, this attractive riverside market town has more than 300 listed buildings from various periods. The Thames has always played an important role in its life; in 1829 the first varsity boat race, between Oxford and Cambridge, took place here on the river and, within a decade, the event was enjoying royal patronage. First held in 1839, the **Henley Regatta** takes place every year in the first week of July, is a marvellous and colourful event with teams from all over the world competing on the mile-long course. Scores of tents and striped marquees are erected on the Berkshire side of the river and champagne flows freely.

Opened in 1988, the **River and Rowing Museum** is a fascinating place that traces the rowing heritage of Henley, the river's changing role in the town's history, and even provides the opportunity to 'walk' the length of the River Thames, from source to sea, taking in all the locks. Housed in spacious, purpose-built premises designed by the award-winning architect, David Chipperfield, its exhibits include the boat in which the British duo, Steve Redgrave and Matthew Pinsent, won their gold medals at the 1996 Olympics. A major attraction re-creates Kenneth Grahame's much-loved tale *The Wind in the Willows*. In a spectacular walk-through exhibition visitors can meet all the familiar characters and places in the book, with EH Shepard's illustrations brilliantly brought to life. The Museum is open from 10am every day.

Henley was the site of Rupert's Elm, where Prince Rupert is said to have hanged a

Roundhead spy. A portion of the tree is preserved in this museum. Also situated on the riverbank, beside the town's famous 18th-century five-arched bridge decorated with the faces of Father Thames and the goddess Isis, is the Leander Club, the headquarters of the famous rowing club.

Apart from the boating, which is available throughout the summer, and the pleasant walks along the riverbanks, there are many interesting shops, inns, and teashops in the town. Buildings of note include Speaker's House, home of Speaker Lenthall of the Long Parliament who lived there in the 17th century, some attractive almshouses around the churchyard, and Chantry House, which dates from the 14th century and is believed to be the oldest building in Henley.

Just down river from the town centre lies **Fawley Court**, a wonderful private house that was designed by Christopher Wren and built in 1663 for Colonel William Freeman. Now owned by the Marian Fathers, the **Museum** within contains a library, documents relating to the Polish kings, and memorabilia of the Polish army. The Court is not generally open to the public.

To the northwest of Henley, at Rotherfield Greys, is another interesting house, **Greys Court** (National Trust), dating originally from



Hart Street, Henley-on-Thames



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the 14th century, but much altered down the years; a beautiful courtyard and a tower survive from the earliest building. A Tudor wheelhouse is among the interesting outbuildings, and the gardens offer many delights, notably old-fashioned roses and wisterias, an ornamental vegetable garden, a ha-ha, an ice-house, and the Archbishop's Maze, which was inspired, in 1980, by Archbishop Runcie's enthronement speech.



Mapledurham House

Around Henley-on-Thames

SONNING COMMON

3½ miles SW of Henley on the B481

Sonning Common was originally part of the manor of Sonning-on-Thames with the livestock driven up from the flooded riverside pastures to winter on the higher ground.

Widmore Pond, on the edge of the village, is said to have been a Roman silver mine: according to a 17th-century account, when the pond was emptied for cleaning out, upturned oak tree stumps were found in the bottom of the pond along with stag antlers and Roman coins.

MAPLEDURHAM

6½ miles SW of Henley off the A4074

Mapledurham House Church of St Margaret

Watermill

A narrow winding lane leads to this famously picturesque village set beside the Thames. The cluster of brick and flint cottages and the church are overshadowed by the lovely Elizabethan mansion, **Mapledurham House**. It was built on the site of an older manor house by the Blount family and has remained

with their descendants ever since. As well as viewing the great oak staircase and the fine collection of paintings, visitors will find the house's literary connections are equally interesting: Alexander Pope was a frequent visitor in the 18th century; the final chapters of John Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* were set here; and it was the fictional Toad Hall in *The Wind in the Willows*. The house has also featured in films, including *The Eagle has Landed*, and the TV series *Inspector Morse*.

Another attraction on the estate is the old riverside **Watermill**, a handsome late 15th-century construction, which stands on the site of an earlier building that was mentioned in the Domesday Book. The mill remained in operation until 1947 and it was then the longest surviving working mill on the river. Now fully restored, the traditional machinery can be seen in action grinding wholemeal flour, which is then sold through the mill shop.

The **Church of St Margaret** has a number of notable features. It provided a major location for the film *The Eagle has Landed* and is believed to be the only church in the country to have had a king's son as vicar – Lord Augustus FitzClarence, one of William IV's 10 illegitimate children by the actress Mrs Jordan, was appointed to the living in 1829.

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Another curiosity here is that the south aisle is owned outright by the Blount family and partitioned off from the rest of the church. Major restoration was carried out in 1863 by the architect William Butterfield who made great use of coloured brickwork and also refaced the tower with a bold chequered pattern using flint and brick.

GORING-ON-THAMES

9½ miles W of Henley on the B4009

This ancient small town lies across the River Thames from its equally ancient neighbour, Streatley, and, while today they are in different counties, they were once in different kingdoms. This is a particularly peaceful stretch of the river, with the bustle of Pangbourne and Henley-on-Thames lying downstream, and it is some distance to the towns of Abingdon and Oxford further upstream.

In the 19th century, after Isambard Kingdom Brunel had laid the tracks for the Great Western Railway through Goring Gap, the village began to grow as it was now accessible to the Thames-loving Victorians. Though there are many Victorian and Edwardian villas and houses here, the original older buildings have survived, adding an air of antiquity to this attractive place.

WATLINGTON

8 miles NW of Henley off the B480

Watlington Hill

There are superb views over the surrounding countryside from **Watlington Hill**, which rises 700 feet above Watlington Park with its woods of beech and yew. Watlington Hill and its neighbour Pyrton Hill are designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest and are home to over 30 species of butterflies and a wide



Watlington Hill

variety of chalk-loving plants.

EWELME

9 miles NW of Henley off the B4009

At the centre of this pretty village is a magnificent group of medieval buildings, including the church, almshouses and school, which were all founded in the 1430s by Alice Chaucer, granddaughter of the poet Geoffrey, and her husband, the Duke of Suffolk. There is a wonderfully elegant alabaster carving of Alice inside the church and under this effigy is another rather macabre carving of a shrivelled cadaver. In the churchyard is the grave of Jerome K Jerome, author of *Three Men in a Boat*, who moved to the village following the success of his book.

CHALGROVE

10 miles NW of Henley on the B480

Chalgrove is the site of an English Heritage registered Battlefield, where in 1643 Prince Rupert defeated John Hampden. An information board at the site gives details of the battle, and there is also a monument to John Hampden, a local squire and sometime MP for Buckinghamshire who refused to pay Ship Money to the King. He was taken to court in 1638 and incarcerated in the Tower of London. He was a cousin of Oliver Cromwell and in the Civil War became a leading opponent of the King.

THE RED LION INN

115 High Street, Chalgrove, Oxfordshire OX44 7SS
Tel: 01865 890625

The Red Lion is a Free House owned by the Church, dating back to the 15th Century, in the delightful village of Chalgrove, Oxfordshire.

Ray and Sue Sexton, the landlords, are both highly qualified chefs who have won many accolades, including being Head Chef and Patisserie Chef at one of only two pubs in Essex to gain a place in the coveted Michelin Pub Guide, and to be named Food Pub of the Year for East Anglia whilst they were at the helm.

They have built up their growing reputation based on a regularly changed a la carte menu, and a daily specials board that whets the appetite. All meals, including the desserts, are prepared in-house from the best seasonal ingredients available, with as much as possible sourced locally. Their whole ethos is, that excellently prepared and cooked food attracts customers who will return again and again; many do, travelling miles, and bringing friends or recommending them to others.

They have an excellent range of beers, real ales and wines to help you while away those convivial hours with friends.

The pub's front garden leads down to a babbling stream and to the rear there is a large garden (which can accommodate a marquee to seat 200 persons). There are plenty of tables and sun shades for eating outdoors on those balmy summer days, with plenty of space for children to play, who are most welcome. For the winter months there is the log fire to keep you warm and snug.

Ray and Sue are always willing to quote based on your budget and requirements for those special occasions, large or small, and everything will be tailored to make your event memorable.

If you are in or near South Oxfordshire and in need of sustenance, you will not better that available at the Red Lion, the diversion will be well worthwhile as countless others have found; you never know, you may well, and probably will, want to come again.



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STONOR

4 miles N of Henley on the B480

Stonor

The village is the home of Lord and Lady Camoys whose house, **Stonor**, has been in the family for over 800 years. Set in a wooded valley in the Chilterns and surrounded by a deer park, this idyllic house dates from the 12th century, though the beautiful, uniform facade is Tudor and hides much of the earlier work. The interior of the house contains many rare items, including a mass of family portraits. There is also a medieval Catholic Chapel here that was in continuous use right through the Reformation. In 1581, Edmund Campion sought refuge at the house and from a secret room in the roof supervised the printing of his book *Decem Rationes* – Ten Reasons for being a Catholic. An exhibition features his life and work. The gardens, too, are well worth a visit with their lawns, orchard and lovely lavender hedges, and the splendid views they offer over the rolling parkland.

Abingdon

Church of St Helen Museum Abbey

This is an attractive town and one of the country's oldest as it grew up around a Benedictine **Abbey** that was founded in AD 675. Sacked twice by the Danes for its gold and silver, the abbey was practically derelict by the 10th century but, under the guidance of Abbot Ethelwold, the architect of the great Benedictine reform, it once again prospered and was, in its heyday, larger than Westminster Abbey. At one time the abbot here was the largest landowner in Berkshire after the Crown. Unfortunately little remains today of this great religious house, but the

Gatehouse, built in the late 15th century, is a splendid reminder.

The largest town in the Vale of the White Horse, Abingdon was also the county town of Berkshire between 1556 and 1869. The prosperity this brought enabled the townspeople to build the impressive and outsize County Hall of 1678 that dominates the Market Place. This outstanding example of English Renaissance architecture was designed by a pupil of Sir Christopher Wren. In its former Assize court is the **Abingdon Museum**, which provides interesting insights into the town's history.

Another of Abingdon's pleasing buildings, set close to the lovely bridge over the Thames, is the **Church of St Helen** whose 150ft-high steeple dominates the skyline here. Originally built in the 14th century, the church was remodelled in the 15th and 16th centuries, when the town prospered from a thriving wool trade, to provide an altogether larger and



Abingdon Museum

more elaborate building. With its five aisles, it is now broader than it is long. The main glory of the church, the painted ceiling of the Lady Chapel, has been retained from the 14th century. Beside the churchyard, which contains a curious small building that was the blowing chamber for the church organ, are three sets of almshouses. The oldest, Christ's Hospital, was founded in 1446 while the other two, Twitty's Almshouses and Brick Alley Almshouses, date from the early 1700s.

Around Abingdon

DORCHESTER






5 miles SE of Abingdon off the A4074

 Abbey Church  Abbey Museum

This charming little town, situated on the River Thames just before it flows into the River Thames, has been described as "the most historic spot in Oxfordshire", since it was here that Christianity was established in the southwest of England by St Birinus. Known as the Apostle of the West Saxons, Birinus was consecrated in Genoa, landed in Wessex in AD634, and converted King Cynegils of Wessex in the following year. As a mark of his devotion to the church, Cynegils gave Dorchester to Birinus and the church he built



Dorchester Village

 historic building  museum and heritage  historic site  scenic attraction  flora and fauna



here became the cathedral of Wessex.

The **Abbey Church of St Peter and St Paul** was built in 1170 on the site of that Saxon church and greatly extended during the next two centuries. Its chief glory is the 14th-century choir and the huge Jesse window, showing the family tree of Jesus, which has retained its original stained glass. The story of the abbey, along with the history of settlement in the area going back to neolithic times, is told in the **Abbey Museum**, which is housed in a classroom of the former Grammar School, built in 1652. It has a series of displays, in the oak-panelled Old School Room, in the Abbey Guest House and in Abbey's Cloister Gallery.

The town itself has some attractive old houses with overhanging upper stories, a fine Georgian coaching inn, and a pleasant footpath that crosses fields to the bank of the Thames.

LITTLE WITTENHAM

5 miles SE of Abingdon off the A4130

 Wittenham Clumps  Pendon Museum

This village, which has a number of pretty cottages, lies beneath the **Wittenham Clumps**, which for centuries formed an important defensive position overlooking the Thames. In the village church of St Peter are effigies of Sir William Dunch, a former MP for Wallingford, and his wife, who was the aunt of Oliver Cromwell. A little way northwest, towards the village of Long Wittenham, is the unique **Pendon Museum** (see panel opposite), which recaptures scenes showing the beauty of the English countryside through, detailed models. The main attraction is a model village built in tiny scale to resemble a typical 1930s village in the Vale of the White Horse. The model is the incredibly skilled and

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Pendon Museum

Long Wittenham, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 4QD
Tel: 01865 407365
website: www.pendonmuseum.com

Pendon Museum at Long Wittenham in Oxfordshire is a delightful museum devoted to portraying parts of rural England as they were in the 1920s and 30s - in particular, it reflects how life was influenced by the transport infrastructure of the period. It achieves this through the medium of modelling - accurate, authentic and carried out to the highest standard at a 1:76 scale; literally art in three dimensions.

Pendon was founded in 1954 by Roye England, an Australian who first came to England in 1925 to patent an invention related to the control of model railways. It was not long before he found himself staying with a cousin in Wanborough, in the Vale of White Horse - a countryside that soon beguiled him with its rural charm. But Roye saw change in the offing, as he later wrote in the 1980s in "The Vale that Inspired Pendon".

The museum is run, and the models it displays are built, almost entirely by a number of dedicated volunteers and it is open to the public at weekends, on bank holidays and on Wednesdays in school holidays.



detailed work of Roye England, an Australian who came to this country in 1925 to study. The model incorporates a model railway (Roye England's first passion) and, as a tribute to the master, who died in 1995, there's a tiny model of himself in the 1:76 scale of the whole model. A highly detailed model of a Dartmoor scene is also in the display.

BLEWBURY

7 miles S of Abingdon on the A417






In the foothills of the Berkshire Downs, this pretty village was, and remains, a favoured spot for artists and writers. Among the latter was Kenneth Grahame, who lived in a Tudor brick house in the village from 1910 to 1924. He wrote the book for his son, who tragically died while an undergraduate at Oxford. They are buried together in the churchyard of St Cross in Oxford. Mr Toad compares himself favourably with Oxford students in the book:

*The clever men at Oxford
Know all that there is to be known
But they none know one half as much
As intelligent Mr Toad.*

WALLINGFORD

8 miles SE of Abingdon on the A4130

A busy and prosperous town, Wallingford has been a strategic crossing point of the Thames since ancient times. Alfred the Great first fortified the town, against the Danes, and the Saxon earth defences can still be seen. It was here that William the Conqueror crossed the river on his six-day march to London. Wallingford was also an important trading town; it received its charter in 1155 and for several centuries had its own mint. During the Civil War, the town was a Royalist stronghold defending the southern approaches to Oxford, the site of the Royalist headquarters. It was besieged in 1646 by the Parliamentary forces under Sir

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RED LION

Brightwell cum Sotwell, Oxfordshire OX10 0RT
Tel: 01491 837373

e-mail: sue@redlion.biz website: www.redlion.biz

The Red Lion is a traditional 16th century half timbered, thatched inn. It has played an integral part in village life for centuries, and continues to do so today.

Owned by Sue Robson, this charming pub and restaurant can be found nestled at the heart of one of Oxfordshire's most beautiful villages. Located in Brightwell cum Sotwell, The Red Lion was voted South Oxfordshires 'Pub of the Year' 2009 by CAMRA and is included in the 2009, 2010 and 2011 CAMRA Good Beer Guide.

The Red Lion has done well to recover from a devastating fire in December 2001 when a chimney fire set light to the thatched roof destroying much of the building and the adjoining cottage. It has re-established itself as a thriving village pub.

The staff members at The Red Lion, like Sue, are very friendly and everyone is made to feel very welcome, be they a regular or a visitor to the area. In its time the pub has even played host to royalty on two separate occasions. Firstly, George III dined there during a stag hunt in the area on November 7th 1781.

In 1914 the Prince of Wales, later uncrowned Edward VIII visited it during his student days.

Sue is well known for her homemade bread, which she uses to make the wide range of sandwiches on offer. The lunch time menu offers varied choices including filo parcel stuffed with spinach & feta, and homemade chicken liver pate, served with toasted homemade bread, salad garnish and homemade chutney.

Sue and her team try to source the produce they use locally and the quality really shows. The pies are a speciality here, and are made with or without a pastry bottom with a choice of either homemade shortcrust or puff pastry top. Fillings include; roast chicken and leeks, mixed game in a red wine and juniper gravy, steak and kidney and Moroccan lamb and apricot. Sue and her team pride themselves on serving homemade pub classics with changes to the menu to reflect the seasons, such as liver and bacon, or stew and dumplings in the winter, and a range of tartlets and salads in the summer.

Drinks can be enjoyed in the light and airy bar and there is a good selection of traditional beers, fine wines and spirits available. Alternatively, on warmer days customers can sit outside at the front and watch the world go by, or relax in the beautiful Mediterranean style garden at the rear.

The Red Lion is open 12pm – 3pm and 6pm – 11pm Monday through til Saturday with evening times on a Sunday shortened to 7pm – 10.30pm. (Only basket meals are served on Sunday and Monday evenings).



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FORDS FARM B&B

Ewelme, Wallingford, Oxfordshire OX10 6HU
Tel: 01491 839272

e-mail: fordsfarm@callnetuk.com
website: www.fordsfarm.co.uk

Nestled in the peaceful historic village of Ewelme near Wallingford is **Fords Farm**; the essence of Oxfordshire hospitality, surrounded by postcard-perfect countryside. The farmhouse here, part of which dates back to the 15th Century, has maintained many original features such as an inglenook fireplace and flagstone flooring, adding great character. The gardens too are traditionally styled, and have special features such as a yew hedge and crazy paving which give the feel of stepping back in time. Within a short distance from the farm is a beautiful walk along an ancient track thought to be Britain's oldest road.

For almost 20 years Fords Farm has run their successful, four star Bed and Breakfast. Even the most discerning visitors are breath-taken by the tranquillity of the village and farmhouse, and the high standard of the service. The delicately decorated rooms are spacious and filled with light; you are sure to have a comfortable night sleep, woken in the morning by the country sounds of the nearby church clock and the soft calls of collared doves. There are also two self contained self-catering cottages, fully equipped with everything you need during your stay, and opening out onto the pretty walled garden, they are perfect for a family trip or a quiet romantic getaway.



Thomas Fairfax and its walls were breached after a 12-week siege; it was the last place to surrender to Parliament. The castle built by William the Conqueror was destroyed by Cromwell in 1652, but substantial earthworks can still be seen and the museum tells the story of the town from its earliest days.

Buildings of note include the charming 17th-century Town Hall and St Mary's Church with its impressive tower.

SUTTON COURTENAY

2 miles S of Abingdon on the B4016

Church of All Saints

A pretty village that was mentioned in the Domesday Book, with an abbey that was founded in 1350. The village **Church of All Saints**, which dates back to Norman times, contains some fine stone carvings and woodwork, but the real interest lies in the

churchyard. Here can be found the chest tomb of Herbert Asquith, the last Liberal Prime Minister (from 1908 to 1916) and his wife; they lived by the Thames not far from the church. Also here is the grave of Eric Blair, better known as George Orwell, author of *1984* and *Animal Farm*; several yew trees are planted here in his memory.

DIDCOT

4½ miles S of Abingdon on the A4130

Railway Centre

The giant cooling towers of Didcot's power station dominate the skyline for miles around and there is little left of the old town. But the saving grace is the **Didcot Railway Centre** (see panel on page 264), a shrine to the golden days of the steam engine and the Great Western Railway. Isambard Kingdom Brunel designed the Great Western Railway and its

Didcot Railway Centre

Didcot, Oxfordshire OX11 7NJ
Tel: 01235 817200 Fax: 01235 510621
website: www.didcotrailwaycentre.org.uk

The Great Western Railway was incorporated in 1835 to build the railway from Bristol to London and it was designed and engineered by Isambard Kingdom Brunel to be the finest in the land.

Now, at Didcot, half way between Bristol and London, members of the Great Western Society have created a living museum of the Great Western Railway. It is based around the original engine shed and depot to which have been added a typical branch line with a country station and signalling demonstrations and a recreation of Brunel's original broad gauge trackwork on which a replica of the Fire Fly locomotive dating from 1840 operates on special occasions. There is a large collection of GWR steam locomotives, carriages and wagons.

On steamdays the locomotives come to life and you can ride in the 1930s trains on one or both of the demonstration lines. Steamdays are on most weekends from March to September, public holidays (not Christmas), and Wednesdays from mid-July to the end of August. There is a programme of special events during the year, including 'Day Out with Thomas' with the children's favourite tank engine, and Family Activity Days with lots to keep the children entertained whilst mum and dad can try their hand at becoming an engine driver.



THE BEAR AT HOME

High Street, North Moreton, Oxfordshire OX11 9AT
Tel: 01235 811311
e-mail: tim@bear-at-home.co.uk
website: Bear-at-home.co.uk

The Bear at Home is a charming 500 year old country pub in the picturesque & historic village of North Moreton. The first impression is of a "homely", relaxed, pub, with low ceilings and nooks & crannies. The owners are antique dealers too, so many pieces in the pub are for sale.

Food is freshly prepared & wholesome, including fresh fish on the "specials" board, traditional steaks, salads & vegetarian dishes, as well as a range of filled baguettes. This is a popular pub with local residents & businesses, so it's wise to phone ahead to ensure you get a table.

The Bear is a regular in the Good Beer Guide, and at the end of July they run a Beer & Cricket Festival, over 4 days, with live music, so check their comprehensive website for up to date information. The cricket pitch is adjacent to the spacious beer garden, so cricket is a regular feature in the summer months- a quintessential English village scene.



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route through Didcot, from London to Bristol, was completed in 1841. Until 1892, its trains ran on their unique broad gauge tracks and the GWR retained its independence until the nationalisation of the railways in 1948. Based around the engine shed, where visitors can inspect the collection of steam locomotives, members of the Great Western Society have re-created the golden age of the railway. The displays also include a beautiful re-creation of a country station, complete with level crossing. The locomotives on display include saddle tanks, pannier tanks and famous main-line engines, along with one of the very distinctive Great Western diesel railcars, this one, No 22, dating from 1940. The Firefly Trust built a reproduction of the broad-gauge Firefly locomotive of 1840. Steam days are held throughout the year when locomotives once again take to the broad gauge track and visitors can also see the Victorian signalling system and the centre's Relics Display.

NORTH MORETON

3 miles east of Didcot off the A4130

North Moreton is a quintessential English village whose spiritual heart is the 13th-century All Saints Church. Medieval stained glass panels depict 15 scenes from the lives of Christ, the Virgin Mary, St Peter, St Paul and St Nicholas.

Wantage

Church of St Peter & St Paul

Vale & Downland Museum

This thriving market town in the Vale of the White Horse was, in AD849, the birthplace of Alfred the Great and remained a Royal Manor until the end of the 12th century. In the central market place, around which there are



Church of St Peter & St Paul, Wantage

some fine Georgian and Victorian buildings, is a huge statue of the King with a battleaxe in one hand and a manuscript in the other, symbolising his skill as a warrior and his dedication to learning. Alfred spent much of his life (he died in AD899) defending his kingdom from the Danes in the north before being able to style himself Rex Anglo rum – King of the English.

Unfortunately, only the **Church of St Peter and St Paul** has survived from medieval times and, though it was heavily restored in 1857 by GE Street, various features have survived from the original 13th century structure. There's also a brass commemorating the life of Sir Ivo Fitzwarren, the father of Dick Whittington's wife, Alice.

Opposite the church is the **Vale and Downland Museum Centre**, which is located

DOLPHIN ART

23-24 Market Place, Wantage, Oxfordshire OX12 8AE

Tel: 01235 763030

e-mail: patrick@dolphinart.co.uk website: www.dolphinart.co.uk

Providing a friendly, informal place to browse local art and highly collectible limited editions, **Dolphin Art** is a gallery with an extremely high reputation in the art world.

Owners Patrick and Tara O'Leary offer a personal one to one service to customers, be it their first visit to the gallery or as an existing client. The couple has run the business since 1999 and recently revamped the whole shop. It is now an incredibly stylish destination shop for anyone with a fondness for art and it attracts a good number of people through its doors.

Dolphin Art is unique and as well as an impressive gallery it is an art materials stockist and picture framers. It is located in the delightful and charming market place of Wantage, Oxfordshire. This thriving market town in the Vale of the White

Horse was, in 849AD, the birthplace of Alfred the Great and remained a Royal Manor until the end of the 12th century. In the central market place, around which there are some fine Georgian and Victorian buildings, is a huge statue of the King.

Dolphin Art is located nearby and its reputation as a quality picture framers draws customers in from far afield. Many return for Patrick and Tara's advice and patience as they choose from the considerable collection of bespoke frames on offer. There is also a fine selection of sculptures, glassware and ceramics, which are popular with visitors.

A wide range of materials for the professional amateur artist is stocked at this wonderful gallery. For younger artists there is a fabulous range of art materials to inspire children to get stuck in and let their creativity and imaginations flow.

Whatever your age, a visit to Dolphin Art can be highly recommended if you have a passion for art. There are frequent original art exhibitions held here as well as art demonstrations. Ring for details.



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in another of the town's old buildings – a house dating from the 16th century – and a reconstructed barn. Dedicated to the geology, history, and archaeology of Wantage and the Vale of the White Horse, the displays cover the centuries from prehistoric times to the present day. The Centre has a café with a delightful terrace and garden.

It was in Wantage that the first steam tramway operated, opening in 1873 and

surviving until 1948.

Just to the east of the town lies Ardington House, a beautifully symmetrical, early 18th-century building that is the home of the Baring family. Occasionally open to the public, the best feature here is the Imperial Staircase – where two flights come into one – of which this is a particularly fine example.

BROOK BARN COUNTRY HOUSE


Letcombe Regis, nr Wantage, Oxfordshire OX12 9JD

Tel: 01235 766502

e-mail: info@brookbarn.com website: www.brookbarn.com





Brook Barn combines boutique hotel luxury with the relaxing ambience of an English country house – with the bonus of outstanding food. It stands in an acre of delightful grounds with an orchard, a wild flower meadow, a lovely chalk stream and plenty of benches and chairs for guests to enjoy the peaceful setting. The guest accommodation comprises five cosy beamed rooms with all the much needed necessities. Food is a very important here, with a fine choice for breakfast, delicious afternoon teas and an evening menu (optional) using fresh local produce.



DEWS MEADOW FARM SHOP

Tel: 01235 868634

DEWS MEADOW FARM SHOP

Oxford Road, East Hanney, Wantage OX12 0HP

Nestled in the grand market town of Wantage, in the Vale of White Horse, is the Dews Meadow Farm Shop; a delight for the eyes, and the taste-buds! This gloriously rustic farm shop prides itself in their delicious local produce. Dews Meadow is renowned for their pork products, which are loved by locals and visitors alike. Their range includes award-winning dry-cured green and smoked bacon, homecured hams and collars, and speciality home-made sausages and burgers, which are available in additive-free, low salt and gluten-free varieties. As well as these there are pork pies, hand-made sausage rolls, and a whole range of tempting treats. All of these pork delights are sourced from the Dews Meadow Farm, where traditional and ethical practice is a priority. The pigs are bred outside and are finished in a straw-based, unstressed system, where no growth-promoters, hormones, routine antibiotics, or added copper are used. Add the optimum mix of breeds, and the result is the flavour and tenderness of traditional pork. Having been trailblazers with additive-free pork and dry-curing of bacon since the mid-80's, Andy and Jane have developed a customer focused business, employing staff who echo their passion for quality and friendliness.

The shop is open Monday to Saturday 8:30am – 5pm (6pm on Friday).

e-mail: bowler.jane@btinternet.com


www.dewsmeadowfarm.co.uk

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Around Wantage

KINGSTON BAGPUIZE

6 miles N of Wantage off the A420

 Kingston Bagpuize House

The intriguing name of this straggling village goes back to Norman times when Ralf de Bachepuise, a contemporary of William the Conqueror, was given land in the area. The village grew to serve the needs of **Kingston Bagpuize House**, a fine mansion dated 1660 with superb gardens. Notable features include a magnificent cantilevered staircase, panelled rooms with some good furniture and paintings, Chinese porcelain and hand-painted wallpaper. Within the mature parkland are many noble trees and a woodland garden – a detailed map is available giving the names and precise location of almost 300 plants. There's also a tearoom and gift shop. Opening times are restricted – call 01865 820259.


STEVENTON

5 miles NE of Wantage on the A4185

Steventon is a small village of mostly modern housing, but in Mill Street stand the National Trust's Priory Cottages, former monastic buildings now converted into two houses. South Cottage contains the priory's original Great Hall, which can be visited in the summer by written appointment.

LETCOMBE BASSETT

2 miles S of Wantage off the B4001

 Segsbury Camp


This tiny village, with a picturesque centre of thatched cottages, has a notable place in literary history: it appears as Cresscombe in *Jude the Obscure*, which Thomas Hardy wrote while staying here. Earlier, Jonathan Swift

spent the summer of 1714 at the village's rectory where he was visited by the poet Alexander Pope.

Just to the east of the village lies **Segsbury Camp**, which is sometimes also referred to as Letcombe Castle. Set on the edge of the Berkshire Downs, this massive Iron Age hill fort encloses some 26 acres of land and provides panoramic views along the Vale of the White Horse.

KINGSTON LISLE

4½ miles W of Wantage off the B4507

 The Blowing Stone

Just to the southwest of the attractive Norman Church of St John lies **The Blowing Stone** (or Sarsen Stone), a piece of glacial debris that is perforated with holes. When blown, the stone emits a fog-horn like sound and tradition has it that the stone was used by King Alfred as a



The Blowing Stone, Kingston Lisle

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NORTON HOUSE

Broad Street, Uffington, Faringdon, Oxfordshire SN7 7RA
Tel: 01367 820230

e-mail: carloberman123@btinternet.com

website: www.smoothbound.co.uk/hotels/nortonfaringdon

Going that extra mile to give a personal touch that makes guests feel comfortable and relaxed from the moment they arrive is all in a day's work for owner of **Norton House** Fenella Oberman.

The guest house is charming and its beautiful garden is bursting with colour in the spring and summer. The house itself dates back to the 18th century and its quiet village location offers a relaxing getaway for those wanting to explore the local countryside with its ancient White Horse and the mysterious Waylands Smithy, linked by the Ridgeway path and offering excellent opportunities for walkers.

There are three comfortable guest rooms, one double, one twin/family (well behaved children welcome) and one single room, each with a private bathroom.



Home cooked full English breakfasts with free range local produce are definitely worth getting out of bed for and if you are after an evening meal there is a pub in the village and others nearby. Fenella makes her own bread, jam, marmalade and grows fruit in the garden – it doesn't get fresher than this.




trumpet to summon his troops.

UFFINGTON

5½ miles W of Wantage off the B4507

 Tom Brown's School Museum  White Horse

 Uffington Castle & Dragon's Hill

This large village was, in 1822, the birthplace of Thomas Hughes, the son of the vicar. The author of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, Hughes incorporates many local landmarks, including the White Horse and Uffington Castle, in his well-known work. The **Tom Brown's School Museum** occupies the 380-year-old village schoolroom and tells the story of Hughes' life and works.


The village is perhaps best known for the **Uffington White Horse**. This mysteriously abstract and very beautiful figure of a horse, some 400 feet long, has been created by removing the turf on the hillside to expose the

gleaming white chalk beneath. It is a startling sight, which can be seen from far and wide, and many a tantalising glimpse of it has been caught through the window of a train travelling through the valley below. Popular tradition links it with the victory of King Alfred over the Danes at the battle of Ashdown, which was fought somewhere on these downs in AD871, but modern thinking now considers that it dates from about 100BC.

Above the White Horse is the Iron Age camp known as **Uffington Castle**, and to one side is a knoll known as **Dragon's Hill**, where legend has it that St George killed the dragon.

GREAT COXWELL

8 miles NW of Wantage off the A420

 Great Barn

This village is best known for the magnificent stone **Great Barn** (National Trust) of a

PRESENTATION GIFTS

6 London Street, Faringdon, Oxfordshire SN7 7AA

Tel: 01367 241111

e-mail: denise@presentationgifts.co.uk

website: www.presentationgifts.co.uk

'For the very best in Home, Interior Design, Giftware, Jewellery and Fashion'

Presentation Gifts is one of the very best places in the region to find something for the home, a personal treat or a beautiful present for a special friend. Denise Palmer bought an existing business at the beginning of 2005 and changed just about everything. With her knowledge of the local market and her eye for style and design she created a veritable oasis of wonder and luxury, a browser's delight that's guaranteed to bring a smile to all who pass through the door.

One room is given mainly to women's fashion and accessories and gifts for the home, with a small section for men, the other is filled with kids' toys and accessories aimed at 1 to 10 year olds. The choice throughout is wide and varied, always different and sometimes quirky, and many of the items would be hard to find elsewhere.

The range for ladies includes cardigans which change season to season, shoes, handbags, skincare products by Nougat, jewellery from an assortment of suppliers which includes individual pieces from their Murano glass rings to handmade brooches from Shetland. The men's range is smaller but equally attractive, with luggage, table trivia, clocks and cufflinks among the items all personally chosen by Denise. For children there are table sets, cutlery, essential fairy dust, pretty dresses for the girls, pirates and monsters and vehicles for the boys, games, bunting and lots more.

There's also plenty to enhance the home, including cocktail sets, platters and dishes, jugs and mugs, Boujies soya wax candles and fun retro bunting. For putting the finishing touch to a gift the shop sells a wide range of gift wrap, tissue and ribbon, along with classic cards, invitation cards and thankyou notes. For those who can't get to the shop, Denise has created an online shop, a gorgeous showcase for finding something for everyone; gifts can be wrapped and sent with a personalised note to anywhere in the country or even worldwide.

Denise is passionate about her shop and about Faringdon, a pleasant little town between the Thames and the Ock in the Vale of the White Horse. It was the first capital of the ancient kingdom of Wessex, and Alfred the Great had a castle here. Denise has her home here and brought up her three children in the town, and is a busy and committed member of the business community.



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monastic grange (farm) owned by the Cistercian Abbey at Beaulieu in Hampshire. Regarded as the finest medieval barn in England, it still has the original oak posts that have supported the roof for some 700 years. With Cotswold stone walls more than four feet thick, this huge barn was used to store the tithe – or taxes – received from the tenants of the church land.

BUSCOT

11 miles NW of Wantage on the A417

Old Parsonage and Park

This small village, in the valley of the upper Thames, is home to two National Trust properties: **Buscot Old Parsonage** and **Buscot Park** (both National Trust). The parsonage is a lovely house with a small garden on the banks of the River Thames and was built of Cotswold stone in 1703. The house is open by appointment only.

Buscot Park is a much grander affair, a classic example of a late Georgian house, built in 1780. It houses the magnificent Faringdon Art Collection, which includes paintings by Rembrandt, Murillo, Botticelli and Reynolds; one room is decorated with a series of pictures painted by Edward Burne-Jones, the pre-

Raphaelite artist who was a close friend of William Morris. Painted in 1890, they reflect Burne-Jones's interest in myths and legends and tell the story of the Sleeping Beauty. The grounds of Buscot Park were largely developed in the 20th century and include a canal garden by Harold Peto, a large kitchen garden, a modern water feature and an Egyptian avenue created by Lord Faringdon in 1969 featuring sphinxes and statues based on originals in Hadrian's Villa outside Rome. Anyone interested in the work of Burne-Jones should also visit the village church, where a stained-glass window showing the Good Shepherd was designed by him in 1891, when he was working with William Morris's firm, Morris and Co. The church itself is very pleasantly situated by the river just outside the village.

Witney

St Mary's Church Museum

Cogges Manor Farm Museum

Witney Wool & Blanket Trail

Situated in rich sheep-farming land in the valley of the River Windrush, this old town's name is derived from Witta's Island and it was once of importance as the meeting place of

Witney & District Museum

Gloucester Court Mews, High Street, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 6JF

Tel: 01993 775915

website: www.witneymuseum.com

Opened in 1996, the **Witney & District Museum** is situated in a traditional Cotswold stone building at the northern end of Witney High Street. The ground floor gallery houses permanent displays reflecting the industrial, military and social history of Witney and the surrounding area, while the upper floor incorporates a large gallery which is used for art exhibitions and temporary displays. Other exhibits include a display of historic toys and a typical Witney domestic kitchen of circa 1953. The museum is open from April to October, Wednesdays to Saturdays 10am - 4pm, and Sundays 2pm - 4pm. Admission is £1.00 for adults and free for children.



the Witan, the council of the Saxon Kings.

From the Middle Ages onward the town became much better known for its wool and even more so for its woollen blankets – the water of the River Windrush was said to contribute to their softness. The Witney Blanket Company was incorporated in 1710, but before that there were more than 150 looms in the town working in the blanket trade and employing more than 3000 people. The Blanket Hall, in the High Street, displays the arms of the Witney Company of Weavers; it was built for the weighing and measuring of blankets in an age before rigid standardisation. An informative booklet published by the District Council, the **Witney Wool & Blanket Trail**, details a circular walk of about 2¾ miles taking in many locations associated with the trade.

En route the Trail visits **Cogges Manor Farm Museum**, which stands on the site of a now deserted medieval village of which only the church, priory, and manor house remain. The museum was not open in 2010 and as we went to press, was about to be taken over by a new trust.

Nearby St Mary's Church, Cogges, has a curious tower that is square at the base but then becomes octagonal and is surmounted by a stone pyramid.

The story of the blanket trade and other local industries, including brewing and glove-making, is recounted at the **Witney and District Museum** (see panel on page 271), housed in a traditional Cotswold stone building in a courtyard just off the High Street.

Real-life brewing can be seen at the Wychwood Brewery, which produces more

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than 50,000 barrels of ale each year using traditional methods. Guided tours for groups of up to 20 people are available on Saturday afternoons. The 45-minute tour concludes with a tutored tasting in the Cellar Bar.

St Mary's Church is notable for its soaring spire, which is all the more striking set amidst the surrounding level fields. Built on the scale of a mini-cathedral, the church and spire are 13th century; as Witney's wool trade prospered in the 14th and 15th centuries, chapels and aisles were added; but the interior is marred by over-enthusiastic restoration in Victorian times.

By 1278, Witney had a weekly market and two annual fairs, and in the centre of the market place stands the charming Buttercross. Originally a shrine, the cross has a steep roof with 12 rustic-looking stone columns; its precise date is unknown.

Around Witney

STANTON HARCOURT

4 miles SE of Witney off the B4449

- Stanton Harcourt Manor
- Church of St Michael Pope's Tower

This beautiful village is noted for its historic manor house **Stanton Harcourt Manor**, which dates back to the 14th century. Famed for its well-preserved medieval kitchen, one of the most complete to survive in this country, the house is also renowned for its fine collection of antiques and the tranquil gardens. It was while staying here, from 1717 to 1718, that Alexander Pope translated Homer's great work, the *Iliad*. He worked in the tower, part of the original manor house and now referred to as **Pope's Tower**.

While the manor house draws many people to the village, the splendid Norman **Church**

of **St Michael** is also worthy of a visit. Naturally, the Harcourt chapel dominates, but there are other features of interest, including an intricate 14th-century shrine to St Edburg.

STANDLAKE

5 miles SE of Witney on the A415

- Newbridge

A little way south of the village is the three-arched **Newbridge**, built in the 13th century and now the second oldest bridge across the Thames. Newbridge saw conflict during the Civil War and the Rose Revived pub was used by Cromwell as a refreshment stop.

BRIZE NORTON

3 miles SW of Witney off the A40

Best known for its RAF transport base, Brize Norton village lies to the north of the airfield, the 'Home of Air Transport, Air Refuelling and Military Parachuting'. It's a long straggling village of old grey stone houses and a Norman church, which is the only one in England dedicated to a little-known 5th-century French bishop, St Brice.

RADCOT

7 miles SW of Witney on the A4095

- Radcot Bridge

This tiny hamlet boasts the oldest bridge



CUCKOO LANE ART STUDIOS

is a community of artisans and small businesses located at The Craft Workshops, on the Eynsham Hall Estate between Witney and Woodstock, Oxfordshire OX29 6PS

ARTS-INC. STUDIO - Tel: 01993 881830

websites: www.arts-inc.co.uk or www.jennifer-newman.com or www.richardfox-sculpture.com

Jennifer Newman and Richard Fox are partners of ARTS-INC. STUDIO and ARTS-INC. FIRED SILVER. Established in 1992. Making and exhibiting mixed media paintings, collages, jewellery and sculptures for local and international clients. Jennifer is a PMC certified teacher and will be running precious metal clay jewellery day courses.

GRAHAM'S STUDIO AND GALLERY -

Tel: 07855478296 website: www.grahamsart.com

Graham Rice has a very welcoming gallery and studio open to the public, showing a variety of artwork at various stages of the creative process; oils, watercolours, block-prints, jewellery and cards. Open Thurs, Fri and Sat 10-6pm.

CUCKOO LANE STUDIO - Tel: 0787 9634997 or

01993 811601 or 01993 882166

website: www.cuckoolanestudio.com


The studio hosts Arts and Crafts workshops tutored by local artists for all abilities; the weekend and evening 'taster' classes are designed for fun and relaxation and every participant will leave with a completed artwork - 'Don't Buy It, Create It!'




across the River Thames. Built in 1154, **Radcot Bridge** represents an important crossing place and, as a result, the hamlet has seen much conflict over the centuries. To the north of the bridge are the remains of a castle where, in 1141, King Stephen battled with the dethroned Queen Matilda. In the following century King John fought his barons here before finally conceding and signing the Magna Carta.

FILKINS

8 miles SW of Witney off the A361


 Cotswold Woollen Weavers

 Swinford Museum

This tiny Cotswold village is now the home of a flourishing community of craft workers and artists, many of whom work in restored 18th-century barns. One of these groups operates the **Cotswold Woollen Weavers**, a working weaving museum with an exhibition gallery and a mill shop. In the same village, occupying a charming 17th-century cottage, is the **Swinford Museum**, which concentrates on 19th-century domestic and rural trade and craft tools.

KELMSCOTT

9 miles SW of Witney off the A4095

 Kelmscott Manor

William Morris called the village of Kelmscott “a heaven on earth”, and **Kelmscott Manor**, the exquisite Elizabethan manor house he leased jointly with Dante Gabriel Rossetti, “the loveliest haunt of ancient peace that can well be imagined”. Located near the River Thames, and dating from about 1570, the manor was Morris’s country home from 1871 until his death in 1896. He loved the house dearly and it is the scene of the end of his utopian novel *News from Nowhere*, in which he writes of a

world where work has become a sought-after pleasure. The house, which along with the beautiful garden is open to visitors during the summer, has examples of Morris’s work, the four-poster in which he was born, and memorabilia of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Rossetti is reputed to have found the village boring, so presumably the fact that he was in love with Morris’s wife, Jane, drew him here. Rossetti’s outstanding portrait of her, *The Blue Silk Dress*, hangs in the Panelled Room. Opening times at the manor are limited and admission is by timed ticket.

Morris is buried in the churchyard, under a tombstone designed by his associate Philip Webb on the lines of a Viking tomb house. The church itself is interesting, the oldest parts dating from the late 12th century, and the village includes some fine farmhouses from around the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th centuries.

Oxford

-  The Colleges  Church of St Mary
-  Martyrs Memorial  Radcliffe Camera
-  Bodleian Library  Bridge of Sighs
-  Sheldonian Theatre  Modern Art Oxford
-  Ashmolean  Museum of Oxford
-  Museum of History of Science  Folly Bridge
-  University Museum  Pitt Rivers Museum
-  Bate Collection of Historical Instruments
-  Botanic Garden  Harcourt Arboretum
-  Christ Church Picture Gallery  University Parks

The skyline of this wonderful city can be seen from many of the hilltops that surround it and the view is best described by the 19th-century poet, Matthew Arnold: “that sweet city with her dreaming spires”

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George Bernard Shaw was rather less effusive when he wrote: “Very nice sort of place, Oxford, I should think, for people who like that sort of place”.

Oxford is not all beautiful ancient buildings, but also a town of commerce and industry, and around the academic centre there are suburbs and factories. A city that has been the centre of the country’s intellectual, political, religious and architectural life for over 800 years, it is still an academic stronghold, housing some of the finest minds in some of the finest buildings in the country.

A walled town in Saxon times, Oxford grew on a ford where the River Thames meets the River Cherwell. The first students came here in the 12th century when they were forced out of Paris, at that time Europe’s leading academic centre. Intellectual pursuits then were chiefly religious, and, as the town already

had an Augustinian Abbey, it soon became the country’s leading seat of theological thinking. However, there was considerable tension between the townsfolk and the intellectuals and in the 13th century, in a bid to protect their students, the university began to build colleges – enclosed quadrangles with large, sturdy front doors. The first colleges, University (1249), Balliol (1263) and Merton (1264) were soon joined by others, which to this day maintain their own individual style while all coming under the administration of the university.

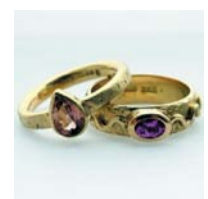
Merton College was founded by Walter de Merton, Lord Chancellor of England, as a small community of scholars. The present buildings mostly date from the 15th to 17th centuries, with Mob Quad as the university’s oldest. The key feature of the college is its splendid medieval library where the ancient

BRIDGET WHEATLEY CONTEMPORARY JEWELLERY

38 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1HZ
Tel: 01865 722184 Fax: 01865 790858
e-mail: bridget.wheatley@nthworld.com
website: www.bridgetwheatley.com

Located on the multi cultural Crowley Road in elegant Oxford, **Bridget Wheatley Contemporary Jewellery** contains such a sumptuous and dramatic collection of jewellery it is sure to take your breath away. The gorgeous pieces of jewellery have been specially selected from the collections of British and European designers, and are in every way beautiful and unique. Of these pieces there is a huge range of different styles and luxurious materials, including diamonds, sapphires, semi precious stones, delicate irregular freshwater pearls and red, yellow & white gold; as well as contemporary metals and plastics finely crafted into elegant shapes.

The craftsmanship at Bridget Wheatley really shines through their bespoke commissioned jewellery pieces, so perfectly capturing their client’s imaginations. Their sublime wedding jewellery commissions are very popular with locals and visitors alike, and the knowledgeable helpful shop assistants help to reduce the overwhelming task of finding the perfect wedding ring, or other jewellery for that special day. In addition to beautiful jewellery, the shop also provides a colourful array of modern and traditional cards, wrapping paper and gift boxes; everything you will need to add the finishing to the perfect present.





Balliol College, Oxford

books are still chained to the desks. Once considered the poor relation to other, wealthier colleges, **Balliol College** was founded as an act of penance by John Balliol, and for many years it was reserved for poor students only. Most of the college buildings now date from the 19th century when the college was instrumental in spearheading a move towards higher academic standards.

Thought by some to have been founded by Alfred the Great, **University College** was endowed in 1249, but the present college buildings are mostly 17th century. The poet Shelley was the college's most famous scholar, though he was expelled in 1811 for writing a pamphlet on atheism.

One of the most beautiful colleges in the city, **Christ Church**, was founded in 1525 as Cardinal College by Thomas Wolsey and re-founded as Christ Church in 1546 by Henry VIII after Wolsey had fallen from royal favour. The visitor entrance is at the garden gate, through the Memorial Gardens, and leads through the bottom of Tom Tower (designed by Christopher Wren and home of the Great Tom bell) into Tom Quad, the largest of the city's quadrangles. From here there is access to the rest of the college and also to the college's chapel. Christ Church Cathedral is the only

college chapel in the world to be designated a cathedral and was founded in 1546 on the remains of a 12th-century building. Christ Church also has a superb **Picture Gallery** (see panel opposite) with an important collection of Old Master paintings and drawings.

Another splendid college well worth a visit is **Magdalen College**, which has extensive grounds that include a riverside walk, a deer park, three

quadrangles and a series of glorious well-manicured lawns. It was founded in 1458 by William Waynflete, Bishop of Winchester, and its bell tower is one of the city's most famous landmarks.

Oxford was closely involved in the Civil War and was for three years the King's headquarters. Several of the colleges were pressed into service by the Royalists: Wadham and New College were both used as stores for arms and gunpowder; Magdalen was Prince Rupert's headquarters and the tower was used as Charles's lookout when the Earl of Essex laid siege to the city. The damage caused by Cromwell's men is dramatically illustrated by bullet holes in the statue of the Virgin in the wonderful **Church of St Mary the Virgin**. It was in this church that the trial of the Protestant martyrs Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley and Thomas Cranmer was held. They were found guilty of heresy and burned to death in a ditch outside the city walls. The three are commemorated by the **Martyrs Memorial**, erected in 1841 in St Giles. If Oxford was the temporary home of countless luminaries (from Wolsey, Wesley and Wilde to more than a dozen British Prime Ministers), it is also the permanent resting place of many others. In the churchyard of St Cross are buried Kenneth

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Christ Church Picture Gallery

Oxford, Oxfordshire OX1 1DP

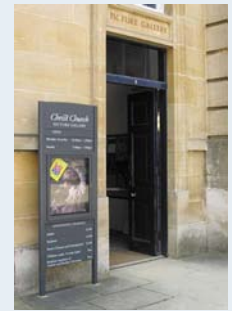
Tel: 01865 276150

e-mail: picturegallery@chch.ox.ac.uk website: www.chch.ox.ac.uk

Christ Church is unique among the Oxford and Cambridge colleges in possessing an important collection of Old Master paintings and drawings, housed in a purpose built gallery of considerable architectural interest in itself.

General John Guise bequeathed his collection of over 200 paintings and almost 2000 drawings to his former college, where it arrived after his death in 1765. This extraordinary gift enabled Christ Church to introduce art into Oxford education without the necessity to travel to Italy or to access to stately homes, which still held the majority of art in the country. At that date the collection was unequalled by any other Oxford institution.

The internationally renowned drawings collection in the Picture Gallery at Christ Church is regarded as one of the most important private collections of Old Masters and includes work by many masters of the calibre of Leonardo, Michelangelo, Durer, Raphael and Rubens. For reasons of conservation the entire drawings collection cannot be permanently on show, but a selection of drawings is always on view. These small in-house exhibitions are changed every three months to enable the public to see a varied selection from this part of the collection.



Grahame (*The Wind in the Willows*), Kenneth Tynan and the composer Sir John Stainer. William Laud, 17th-century Archbishop of Canterbury, is buried in the chapel of St John's College; JRR Tolkien, Oxford professor and author of *The Lord of the Rings*, and the philosopher Sir Isaiah Berlin lie in Wolvercote cemetery; and CS Lewis, critic and writer of the Narnia series of books, is at rest in the churchyard of Holy Trinity, Headington.

Many of the colleges have lovely peaceful gardens, some of them open to the public at various times, and the **University Parks** are a perfect place for a stroll at any time. As well as the college buildings, Oxford has many interesting and magnificent places to explore. At the city's central crossroads, unusually named Carfax and probably derived from the Latin for four-forked, is a tower, Carfax Tower, which is all that remains of the 14th-century Church of St Martin. A climb to the

top of the tower offers magnificent views across the city. One of the most interesting buildings, the **Radcliffe Camera**, was built between 1737 and 1749 to a design by James Gibb. England's earliest example of a round reading room (camera means chamber, or room), this splendid domed building still serves this purpose for the **Bodleian Library**. Named after Sir Thomas Bodley, a diplomat and a fellow of Merton College, it contains



Bodleian Library, Oxford

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over five and a half million books and is one of the world's greatest libraries. The collection of early printed books and manuscripts is second only to the British Library in London and, though members of the University can request to see any book here, this is not a lending library and the books must be read and studied on the premises.

Close by is the Clarendon Building, the former home of the Oxford University Press and now part of the Bodleian, and also in this part of the city is the **Bridge of Sighs**, part of Hertford College and a 19th-century copy of the original bridge in Venice. In Oxford, the bridge crosses a street rather than a canal. The magnificent **Sheldonian Theatre** was designed and built in the style of a Roman theatre by Christopher Wren between 1664 and 1668 while he was Professor of Astronomy at the University. It is still used today for its intended purpose, as a place for

University occasions including matriculation, degree ceremonies, and the annual Encaenia, when honorary degrees are conferred on distinguished people. As well as the superb wooden interior, the ceiling has 32 canvas panels, depicting Truth descending on the Arts, which are the work of Robert Streater, court painter to Charles II.

Founded in 1965, **Modern Art Oxford** in Pembroke Street has a programme of changing exhibitions, films, talks and activities.

Naturally, the city has a wealth of museums and a good place to start is the **Museum of Oxford**, which covers the story of Oxford through a series of permanent displays showing various archaeological finds. First opened in 1683, and the oldest museum in the country, the **Ashmolean Museum** was originally established to house the collection of the John Tradescants, father and son. On display in this internationally renowned

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museum are archaeological collections from Britain, Europe, Egypt, and the Middle East; Italian, Dutch, Flemish, French and English old masters; Far Eastern art, ceramics, and lacquer work and Chinese bronzes. The Ashmolean, named after the 17th-century antiquary Elias Ashmole, also features many items from the Civil War, including Cromwell's death mask, his watch, King Charles's spurs and a collection of coins, among them the famous Oxford crown and a £3 coin minted by Charles. Here, too, is the **Museum of the History of Science**, a remarkable collection of early scientific instruments including Einstein's blackboard and a large silver microscope made for George III.

In a splendid high-Victorian building, near the University Science Area, is the **University Museum** where the remains of a dodo, extinct since around 1680, and a mass of fossilised dinosaur remains are on display. Also

here is the **Pitt Rivers Museum of Anthropology** with its interesting collection, from a witch in a bottle to a totem pole, taken from all over the world. Musicians will enjoy the **Bate Collection of Historical Instruments**, the most comprehensive collection in Britain of European woodwind, brass and percussion instruments and one of the top five in the country of harpsichords and clavichords.

Another place worthy of a visit, and a particularly peaceful haven in the city, is **Oxford Botanic Garden**, down by the river opposite Magdalen College. Founded in 1621, when plants were practically the only source of medicine, this was a teaching garden where the plants grown were studied for their medicinal and scientific use. Today, the garden contains 8000 species of plants in its four-and-a-half acres, including the National collection of euphorbias. Outside the entrance is a rose

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garden commemorating the work of Oxford's scientists in the discovery and use of penicillin.

Under the same ownership as the Botanic Garden, the **Harcourt Arboretum** can be found at Nuneham Courtenay, six miles south of Oxford off the A4074. As well as a magnificent collection of trees, the site includes a bluebell wood.

Oxford is also the place where the River Thames changes its name to the poetic Isis (an abbreviation of the Latin Thamesis) and punts can be hired at various points along its banks.

Around Oxford

HEADINGTON


2 miles E of Oxford on the A40

Now a popular residential suburb of Oxford,

Headington pre-dates the city by several centuries. It was the centre of an Anglo-Saxon royal domain with a palace where St Frideswide grew up and Henry I came to stay. From the nearby quarries came the stone used to build many of the Oxford colleges. You can enjoy a grand view of them from South Park where Parliamentary troops camped during the Civil War.

WHEATLEY

4 miles E of Oxford on the A40

 Waterperry Gardens

This former quarry village retains many old buildings, of which the most interesting is a curious conical lock-up. To the west, close to the M40 (junction 8), are the famous **Waterperry Gardens** surrounding Waterperry House (the house is not open to the public). Established by Beatrix Havergal as a

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residential gardening school for women in the 1930s, Waterperry is now part pleasure garden and part commercial garden centre. The gardens are host each year to Art in Action, which brings together many of the world's finest craftspeople.

GARSINGTON

4 miles SE of Oxford off the B480

 Garsington Manor  Church of St Mary

The most distinguished building hereabouts is **Garsington Manor**, built on a hilltop of mellow Cotswold stone in the 16th century. Between 1915 and 1927, this was the home of the socialite Lady Ottoline Morrell and her husband Philip who were hospitable to a whole generation of writers, artists and intellectuals, including Katherine Mansfield, Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, Siegfried Sassoon, DH Lawrence, TS Eliot, Rupert Brooke, Bertrand Russell and Aldous Huxley. Huxley based an account of a country house party in his novel *Crome Yellow* on his experiences at Garsington, thereby causing a rift with his hostess. She found his description all too recognisable and they were estranged for some time. It seems that Lady Ottoline was not very lucky in the artists on whom she lavished her attention and hospitality. DH Lawrence also quarrelled with her after drawing a less than flattering, but clearly recognisable, portrait of life at her house in *Women in Love*.



Garsington's other claim to literary fame is that Rider Haggard was sent to the school run by the Rev HJ Graham at the rectory in 1866. The present house is later, built in 1872, but across the road from the Church is a 16th-century gateway from the rectory he would have known. While there Haggard became friendly with a local farmer named Quartermain whom he must have


remembered with affection as he used the name for his hero, many years later, in his novel *King Solomon's Mines*.

The village **Church of St Mary** is a pleasant and cosy building with fine views to the south over the Chilterns from its hill top position, but it also looks over the industrial belt to the south of Oxford. Though the interior is chiefly Victorian, the church has retained its Norman tower and inside there is an elegant memorial to Lady Ottoline.

THAME

11 miles E of Oxford on the A418

 Church of St Mary  Grammar School

 Prebendal House

Founded in AD635 as an administrative centre for the Bishop of Dorchester, Thame first became a market town in the 13th century and its importance as a commercial centre is evident by the wide main street it still has today. Lined with old inns and houses, some of which go back to the 15th century, this is a delightful place to visit.

The imposing **Church of St Mary**, tucked away at one end of the High Street, was built in the 13th century, though the aisles were widened in the 14th century and the tower was heightened in the 15th century. In the centre of the chancel is a monument to Lord John Williams who was notorious for having helped burn Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in the 16th century. To the west of the church stands the **Prebendal House**, which, in its oldest parts, dates from the 13th century. A prebend was an income granted to a priest by a cathedral or collegiate church. At Thame the prebend was established in around 1140 by Lincoln Cathedral. A special residence for the holders of the office was first mentioned in 1234.

COUNTRY COLLECTIONS

47 High Street, Wheatley, Oxon OX33 1XX

Tel: 01865-875701

e-mail: country_collections@live.co.uk

website: www.countrycollectionswheatley.co.uk

Anita Desenclos has run **Country Collections** for over 14 years now, and in that time has grown it from one small room into the successful shop that it is today. Set in the centre of the historic Oxfordshire village of Wheatley, Country Collections fits in perfectly as it dates back to the 16th century, when many of the village's finest buildings were constructed. Roman and Saxon remains have been found here, and visitors to Wheatley will find it has a fine range of both historic churches and ancient pubs! It also has one of the best shops in the area.

Country Collections is as delightful inside as it is outside, with that eclectic mix of items for sale that makes for the best kind of antique-browsing. The interior still has many of its 16th-century features, including the original beams, and the rooms are filled with period furniture, affordable antiques, vintage collectables, costume jewellery, linens, crockery and a range of giftware to suit all pockets. You'll find everything from dressing tables to gloves for special occasions, from ear-rings to porcelain, and from garden statuary to kitchen clocks. Country Collections is open Monday-Saturday, 10am-4.30pm.



The town also has a famous **Grammar School**, housed in a Tudor building in Church Lane. The schoolmaster's house faces the road and over the doorway are the arms of Lord Williams, who founded the school in 1558. John Hampden, one of the Parliamentary leaders during the Civil War, was at school here and also died at Thame. When the Civil War broke out he raised a regiment of infantry for the Parliamentary Army and fought with great bravery at Edgehill and Reading. He was wounded at the battle of Chalgrove Field in June 1643 and was carried back to Thame, where he died some days later in an inn that stood on the High Street. A plaque on a wall denotes the site.

NUNEHAM COURTENAY

5 miles S of Oxford on the A4074

Nuneham Park

When the 1st Earl of Harcourt moved his family here from Stanton Harcourt in 1756, he built the splendid **Nuneham Park**, one of the grandest mansions in Oxfordshire. The earl commissioned Capability Brown to landscape the grounds and observing the completed work deemed it "as advantageous and delicious as can be desired, surrounded by hills that form an amphitheatre and, at the foot, the River Thames."



Nuneham House

To achieve this idyllic result, the earl had the old village moved a mile away and out of sight. It's a charming model village of 18th-century cottages facing each other in matched pairs on either side of the road. The mansion house is now a conference centre, but its parkland forms the Arboretum of Oxford University and is open to the public (see under Oxford).

ELSFIELD

2 miles N of Oxford off the A40

This small village of farms and thatched cottages was the home of the author and administrator John Buchan, 1st Baron Tweedsmuir, from 1919 until 1935 when he left to take up his appointment as Governor-General of Canada. During his time at Elsfield Manor House he wrote a number of books, including *Midwinter*, written in 1923 and partly set in the vicinity. His ashes are buried by the east wall of the churchyard of St Thomas of Canterbury. RD Blackmore, author of *Lorna Doone*, lived in Elsfield as a child while his father was the vicar.

WOODSTOCK

8 miles NW of Oxford on the A44

Blenheim Palace

Oxfordshire County Museum Secret Garden

Situated in the Glyme Valley, in an area of land that was originally part of the Wychwood Forest, the name of this elegant Georgian market town means a place in the woods. To the north of the River Glyme is the old Saxon settlement, while on the opposite bank lies the town that was developed by Henry II in the 13th century to serve the Royal Park of Woodstock. There had been hunting lodges for the Kings of England here long before the Norman invasion, and it was Henry I who established the deer park around the manor of

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Woodstock. It was while at his palace here that Henry II first seduced Rosamund, whom he is said to have housed in a bower in the park. One story tells how Henry's wife, Queen Eleanor, managed to uncover the couple by following an unravelled ball of silk that had become attached to her husband's spur.

This long since disappeared medieval palace was also the birthplace of the Black Prince in 1330, and Princess Elizabeth was held prisoner here in 1558 during the reign of her sister, Queen Mary. On ascending the throne, a grateful Elizabeth I granted the town a second weekly market and two fairs for its loyalty. The palace was damaged during the Civil War, when it served as a Royalist garrison, and the last remains were demolished in 1710.

When the new town became an important coaching centre, many inns were built and survive to this day. The town also prospered as a result of the construction of the Oxford

Canal and later the railway. The old town's trade was glove-making and, traditionally, a pair of new gloves is always presented to a visiting monarch.

The town is also home to the **Oxfordshire County Museum**, which is housed in the wonderful and imposing 16th-century Fletcher's House. As well as the permanent displays on the life of the county through the centuries, the museum hosts regular exhibitions and has a sculpture court and a peaceful garden at whose entrance stand the old town stocks. Closed Monday.

It is the magnificent **Blenheim Palace** (see panel below), one of only a handful of sites in the country to be included on the World Heritage List, which brings most people to Woodstock. The estate and the cost of building the palace was a gift from a grateful Queen Anne to the heroic John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough, for his victory at the

Blenheim Palace

Woodstock, Oxfordshire OX20 1PX
Tel: 01993 810555 Fax: 01993 810585
e-mail: shop@blenheimpalace.com
website: www.blenheimpalace.com

Situated just 8 miles from Oxford on the A44, **Blenheim Palace** was created a World Heritage site in 1987 and is the home of 11th duke of Marlborough and birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill.

The imposing scale of the Palace is beautifully balanced within, by the intricate detail and delicacy of the carvings, the hand painted ceilings and the amazing porcelain collections, tapestries and paintings displayed in each room. On the first floor 'Blenheim Palace: The Untold Story' brings to life enticing tales from the last 300 years.

Set in beautiful parkland of 2,100 acres, which was landscaped by 'Capability' Brown in 1760's, the Palace is surrounded by sweeping lawns and formal gardens. The Pleasure Gardens offer plenty of fun for children and adults alike, including the Marlborough Maze, a giant Chess board and Butterfly farm.



Battle of Blenheim during the Spanish War of Succession. However, the Queen's gratitude ran out before the building work was complete and the duke had to pay the remainder of the costs himself. As his architect, Marlborough chose Sir John Vanbrugh, whose life was even more colourful than that of his patron. He was at once both an architect (although at the time of his commission he was relatively unknown) and a playwright, and he also had the distinction of having been imprisoned in the Bastille in Paris. The result of his work was the Italianate palace, built between 1705 and 1722, which is now seen sitting in a very English park that was designed by Charles Bridgeman and Henry Wise and later landscaped by Capability Brown.

Unfortunately, once completed, the new house did not meet with universal approval: it was ridiculed by Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope, and Marlborough's wife, Sarah, who seems to have held the family purse strings, delayed paying Vanbrugh as long as possible.

Blenheim is a marvellous, grand place with a mass of splendid paintings, furniture, porcelain and silver on show. Visitors will also be interested in the more intimate memorabilia of Sir Winston Churchill. Born here in 1874, Churchill was a cousin of the 9th Duke,



Secret Garden at Blenheim Palace, Woodstock

whose family name remains Churchill.

The **Secret Garden** was opened in 2004, the 300th anniversary of the Battle of Blenheim. The garden was originally planted in the 1950s by the 10th duke, but after his death it became overgrown and virtually inaccessible. Now restored, this Four Seasons garden with its many unusual trees, shrubs and flowers offers an enchanting mix of winding paths, soothing water features, bridges, fountains, ponds and streams.

First grown by George Kempster, a tailor from Old Woodstock, the Blenheim Orange apple took its name from the palace. Though the exact date of the first apple is unknown, Kempster himself died in 1773 and the original tree blew down in 1853. The spot where the tree stood become so famous that it is said that London-bound coaches and horses used to slow down so that passengers might gaze upon it.



Blenheim Palace, Woodstock

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BLADON

1.5 miles S of Woodstock on the A4095

Churchyard

The village lies on the southern edge of the Blenheim estate and it was in the **Churchyard** here in 1965 that Sir Winston Churchill was laid to rest in a simple grave after a state funeral. Also interred here are his parents, his brother John, and his daughters. The ashes of his wife Clementine were buried in his grave in 1977.

LONG HANBOROUGH

2 miles SW of Woodstock

Oxford Bus Museum

Located next to Long Hanborough railway station, the **Oxford Bus Museum** has some 40 vehicles on display, all of which were used at one time for public transport in and around Oxford. They range from early 19th-century horse-trams to buses from the 1980s. Here, too, is the Morris Motors Museum, with vehicles ranging from a 1925 Oxford Bullnose to a 1977 BMC Mini.

NORTH LEIGH

4.5 miles SW of Woodstock off the A4095

Roman Villa

The Saxon-towered St Mary's Church is well worth a visit, and just to the north of the village lies the **Roman Villa**, one of several known to have existed in this area. Little remains apart from the foundations and some mosaic flooring, but this is enough to measure the scale of the place; it had over 60 rooms, two sets of baths and a sophisticated underfloor heating system, all built round a courtyard and clearly the home of a prosperous farming family.

FINSTOCK

5 miles W of Woodstock on the B4022

A charming village with two notable literary associations. It was in 1927, at the 19th-century Holy Trinity Church, that TS Eliot was baptised at the age of 38 following his controversial conversion to Catholicism. The novelist and churchwoman Barbara Pym lived in retirement with her sister in a cottage in the village; she died in 1980 and is buried in the churchyard. A lectern in the church is dedicated to her memory.

CHARLBURY

5 miles NW of Woodstock on the B4026

Museum Railway Station

Cornbury Park

Now very much a dormitory town for Oxford, Charlbury was once famous for its glove-making as well as being a centre of the Quaker Movement – the simple Friends' Meeting House dates from 1779 and there is also a Friends' cemetery. **Charlbury Museum**, close to the Meeting House, has displays in five rooms on the traditional crafts and industries of the town, and the town's charters given by Henry III and King Stephen can also be seen. Well known for its



Cornbury Park, Charlbury

THE NEWLAND'S

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Location: 10 minutes drive from Junction 9 off the M40. Top of Sheep Street a 10 minute walk from Bicester North Train station and 5 minutes walk up from Market Square. On the corner of the turning into Franklin's Yard long stay car park.

olde-worlde **Railway Station**, built by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, complete with a fishpond and hanging baskets, the town also has two interesting great houses.

On the other bank of the River Evenlode is **Cornbury Park**, a large estate that was given to Robert Dudley by Elizabeth I. Although most of the house now dates from the 17th century, this was originally a hunting lodge in Wychwood Forest that had been used since the days of Henry I. Glimpses of the house can be seen from the walk around the estate.

Lying just to the west of the town is Ditchley Park, a restrained and classical house built in the 1720s by James Gibbs. The interiors are splendid, having been designed by William Kent and Henry Flitcroft, and Italian craftsmen worked on the stucco decorations of the great hall and the saloon; the first

treated to give an impression of rich solemnity, the second with a rather more exuberant effect. The house has associations with Sir Winston Churchill, who used it as a weekend headquarters during the Second World War. Appropriately enough, given that Sir Winston had an American mother, Ditchley Park is now used as an Anglo-American conference centre and is not open to the public.

Bicester

Bicester has a traceable history that goes back for a thousand years and a settlement here was recorded in the Domesday Book. Today it is a busy market town and home to Bicester Village – a factory designer outlet shopping village. Because it is close to the M40 motorway linking London with Birmingham

J M WALMAN

1 Station Rd, Launton, nr Bicester, Oxfordshire OX26 5DS
Tel: 01869 252619

The white-washed stone walls of **J M Walman** have been a familiar sight in the pretty village of Launton for over 100 years. This quaint family-run butchers, which has been owned by the same family for the last 30 years (and the lovely deli next door for the last two years), holds true the traditional values and passion for local fresh meat. The business was founded on over a century ago. J M Walman's remains one of Oxfordshire's only Traditional Breed Meat Marketing-accredited butchers; it is committed to rare-breed meats and over 95% of the stock comes from traditional, native herds. All of the staff are fully trained in food handling and amazingly knowledgeable, and are only too happy to recommend cuts or breeds which you will love.

The produce is all local, so nothing travels in a lorry for over 30 minutes, supporting both the local farmers and the environment. The shop is also famed for their home-made sausages, which have received rewards from the prestigious Three Counties Show. So conveniently located, near the breath taking Waddestone Manor, Claydon House, and Blenheim Palace, there is no excuse not to visit this hidden gem and taste for yourself!



THE WHITE HORSE INN

*Daisy Hill, Duns Tew,
Oxfordshire OX25 6JS*
Tel: 01869 340272
e-mail: info@whitehorsedunstew.com
website: www.whitehorsedunstew.com

Set in a quaint Oxfordshire village, **The White Horse Inn** is a traditional Costwold stone pub full of charm and warmth. Owned by Christina White, this gorgeous inn, which dates back to the 17th century, offers the very best in accommodation, food and drink.

Inside the attractive building, you will find traditional flagstone floors, beamed ceilings and walls; and a real olde worlde atmosphere with open fires in each room.

The food here is absolutely delicious and with such a talented head chef it isn't surprising that The White Horse Inn is becoming well known in the area for the dishes it serves. The specials board changes weekly and there is a wide and varied choice on the printed menu. Starters include salad of pan-fried bacon & black pudding, and tempura squid. The dishes are all reasonably priced and slow roasted breast of lamb; classic steak suet pudding; and chef's honey roast & mustard glaze ham are all on the main menu. The produce used is sourced within Oxfordshire and the dishes are made freshly cooked to order.

The desserts are tempting even if you aren't known for having a sweet tooth, with choices such as chocolate eton mess, mango & vanilla crème brûlée, apple & mixed fruit crumble and chilled lemon soufflé with raspberry coulis.

For those with a lighter appetite there is a tasty selection of open sandwiches and baguettes, as well as ploughman's lunch and deli boards. Food is served all day, everyday.

If you are looking for a cosy, welcoming and charming pub selling food throughout the day, then this former coaching inn can be highly recommended. As well as the homey and warm feel of the pub's dining area there is also the option to sit outside, where there is a delightful terraced area, which many visitors like to enjoy on warmer days.

There are 11 letting rooms available in separate cottages within the grounds of the pub. Ring for details.



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via Oxford, the town has seen a considerable growth in size in recent years.

Flora Thompson based her trilogy *Lark Rise to Candleford* on the area northeast of Bicester, including the nearby villages of Juniper Hill, Cottisford, Fringford and Hethe.

Around Bicester

DEDDINGTON

8 miles NW of Bicester off the A423


 Deddington Castle & Castle House

Visitors to this old market town might recognise it as the place that was demolished by a runaway crane in the television adaptation of Tom Sharpe's *Blott on the Landscape*. The damage was, of course, cleverly faked and Deddington, which hovers between a small town and a large village, still retains all its medieval character. Surveyed in the Domesday Book at twice the value of Banbury, the town never developed in the same way as Banbury and Bicester, but it remains a prosperous agricultural centre with a still bustling market place. Little can now be seen of the 12th-century **Deddington Castle**. This was destroyed in the 14th century and most of the building materials were put to good use in other areas of the town. However, excavations have revealed the remains of a curtain wall, a hall and a small rectangular keep.

Close by is **Castle House**, where Piers Gaveston, Edward II's favourite, was held before his execution in 1312. The house's two towers were added later, in the 1650s, when the house was in the ownership of Thomas Appletree. A supporter of Cromwell, Appletree was ordered to destroy the property of Royalists and it was material from two local houses that he used in his building work.

LOWER HEYFORD



6 miles W of Bicester on the B4030

 Rousham House

Situated at a ford across the River Cherwell, which was replaced in the 13th century by a stone bridge, the delightful village of Lower Heyford lies on the opposite bank from its other half – Upper Heyford.

To the south lies **Rousham House**, a fine mansion built in the mid 1600s for Sir Robert Dormer and set in magnificent gardens. The gardens as seen today were laid out by William Kent in 1738 and include many water features, sculptures and follies. Next to the house are very attractive pre-Kent walled gardens with a parterre, herbaceous borders, a rose garden and a vegetable garden. The garden is open to the public all year round; the house has limited opening times – call: 01869 347110.

Banbury

 St Mary's Church  Banbury Cross

 Museum & Tooley's Boatyard

Famous for its cross, cakes and the nursery rhyme, this historic and thriving market town has managed to hang on to many of its old buildings as well as become home to Europe's largest livestock market.

The famous **Banbury Cross** can be found in Horsefair where it was erected, in 1859, replacing the previous one demolished by the Parliamentarians during the Civil War. It was built to commemorate the marriage of Queen Victoria's oldest daughter to the Prussian Crown Prince, and the figures around the bottom of the cross, of Queen Victoria, Edward VII and George V, were added in 1914.

The town's other legendary claim to fame is its cakes, made of spicy fruit pastry, which can

still be bought. Banbury was also, at one time, famous for its cheeses, which were only about an inch thick. This gave rise to the expression “thin as a Banbury cheese”.

On the east side of the Horsefair stands **St Mary's Church**, a classical building of warm-coloured stone and hefty pillars, which are pleasantly eccentric touches. The original architect was SP Cockerell, though the tower and portico were completed between 1818 and 1822 by his son, CR Cockerell. The style reflects the strong influence on English architecture of Piranesi's *Views of Rome*, using massive shapes and giving stone the deliberately roughened appearance, which comes from the technique known as rustication.

Banbury Museum (free) tells the story of the town's development, from the days when it came under the influence of the bishops of Lincoln, through the woollen trade of the 16th century, to the present day. Adjoining the striking modern museum is **Tooley's Boatyard**, a scheduled ancient monument that can be visited as part of a guided tour. Established in 1790 and in continuous use



Tooley's Boatyard, Banbury

ever since, Tooley's is the oldest working dry dock in the country. It was designed to build and repair canal barges and narrowboats and has a boatyard, forge, chandlery and shop. It also runs various courses.

Around Banbury

BROUGHTON

2½ miles SW of Banbury on the B4035

Broughton Castle

Arthur Mee considered **Broughton Castle** “one of the most fascinating buildings in the county”. As you cross the ancient bridge over a moat and approach the sturdy 14th-century gatehouse, it becomes clear that it is indeed something special, the perfect picture of a great Tudor mansion. The house has been owned by the Broughton family since 1451 – Nathaniel Fiennes, 21st Lord Saye and Sele is the present occupant. Over the years there have been several royal visitors, including Queen Anne of Denmark, wife of James I. Both James I and Edward VII used the aptly named King's Chamber, with its hand-

painted Chinese wall paper. The house also played a part in the Civil War as it has a secret room where leaders of the Parliamentary forces laid their plans. Arms and armour from that period are displayed in the castle's grandest room, the Great Hall, which is also notable for its dazzling plaster ceiling installed in 1599. The castle has a walled garden, café and picnic area.

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BLOXHAM

3½ miles SW of Banbury on the A361

Museum St Mary's Church

Dominated by the 14th-century **St Mary's Church**, whose spire is a highly visible local landmark, and its Victorian public school, this large village is one of narrow lanes and fine gentlemen's houses. The church has three notable features: a tower completely covered with carvings of men and beasts; the elaborately carved 15th-century Milcombe Chapel; and some exquisite stained glass by Morris, Burne-Jones and Webb.

The old court house, to the south of the church, contains the **Bloxham Village Museum**, where there is a permanent collection of items on display that tell the life of the inhabitants of the village and surrounding area.

SOUTH NEWINGTON

6 miles SW of Banbury on the A361

Church of St Peter ad Vincula

This small village of ironstone dwellings is home to the **Church of St Peter ad Vincula**, which contains the best medieval wall paintings in the county. Detail and colouring are both superb in the depictions, which include the murders of Thomas à Becket – very gory – and of Thomas of Lancaster (a rebel against Edward II). St Margaret is shown slaying a dragon and there's also a wonderful Virgin and Child.

GREAT TEW

7 miles SW of Banbury off the B4022

One of the most picturesque villages in the county, Great Tew, a planned estate village, had fallen into such disrepair by the 1970s that it was declared a conservation area in

order to save it from complete dereliction. Today, the thatched cottages and houses from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries nestle in a fold in the landscape of rolling countryside. The big house hereabouts is Great Tew Park, dating mainly from the 19th century. Only the garden walls remain of its 17th-century predecessor, owned by Lucius Carey, Lord Falkland. It was a gathering place for some of the great writers and intellectuals of the day, including Edmund Waller and Ben Jonson. In the 17th century, the 5th Viscount Falkland was Secretary to the Navy and gave his name to the Falkland Islands.

HOOK NORTON

7 miles SW of Banbury off the A361

Hook Norton Pottery and Craft Gallery

This large village is best known for its brewery, which was set up by John Harris from his farmhouse in 1849. He started there as a maltster and after years of gaining expertise and learning from experiments, he constructed a purpose-built brewery in 1872. The **Brewery**, which moved to its present premises in 1900, remains in the Harris family. Tours are available, which last about two hours and conclude with a sampling of Hook Norton brews in the visitor centre.

At the **Hook Norton Pottery and Craft Gallery** visitors can watch the internationally renowned potter, Russell Collins, at work. A wide range of hand-crafted pottery including mugs, jugs, dishes, bowls and much more is available to buy.

SWALCLIFFE

5 miles W of Banbury on the B4035

Church of St Peter and St Paul

15th-century Barn Madmarston Hill

The village is dominated by the large **Church**

of **St Peter and St Paul**, which towers over all the other buildings here. Founded in Saxon times, the bulk of the building dates from the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries but it is the tracery in the east window that makes the church noteworthy. However, by far the most impressive building in Swalcliffe is the **Barn**, which has been acknowledged as one of the finest 15th-century half-cruck barns in the country. Built as the manorial barn by New College, Oxford, between 1400 and 1409, it was used to store produce from the manor and never to store tithes. Today, it is home to a collection of agricultural and trade vehicles.

To the northeast of the village, on **Madmarston Hill**, are the remains of an Iron Age hill fort, which was occupied from the 2nd century BC to the 1st century AD.

WROXTON

3 miles NW of Banbury on the A422

Abbey

A charming village of brown stone cottages clustered round the village pond, from which a road leads to **Wroxton Abbey**. This impressive Jacobean mansion was built by Sir William Pope, Earl of Downe, and was the



Wroxton Abbey

home of the North family for 300 years. The gardens and grounds of the abbey, now restored as an 18th-century park, are open to the public, but the house is not. All Saints Church contains several imposing monuments including those to Sir William and his wife, to Lord North, who was Prime Minister from 1770 to 1782, and to the banker Thomas Coutts.

Burford

Church of St John the Baptist

Tolsley Museum

Cotswold Wildlife Park

Often referred to as The Gateway to the Cotswolds, Burford is an enchanting old market town of honey-coloured Cotswold stone set on a hillside rising from the River Windrush. Ancient taverns and a wealth of upmarket shops, cafes and restaurants line the steepish main road.

Lying on important trade routes, north-south and east-west, the town prospered, and its first market charter was granted in 1087. In the 16th century, the town was an important centre of the woollen trade and it was used as the setting for *The Woolpack*, in which the author Celia Harknett describes the medieval wool trade in Europe. After the decline in the wool trade, Burford became an important coaching centre and many of the old inns can still be seen today.

The **Church of St John the Baptist** was built on the wealth of the wool trade and this grand building has the atmosphere of a small cathedral. Originally Norman,

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BURFORD WOODCRAFT

144 High Street, Burford, Oxfordshire OX18 4QU

Tel: 01993 823479

e-mail: enquiries@burford-woodcraft.co.uk

website: www.burford-woodcraft.co.uk

Burford has drawn people to its beautiful Cotswold architecture and one of the top twenty English churches for centuries. However the diversity of its independent shops and galleries is less well known.

One of these, Burford Woodcraft has an excellent reputation for a contemporary collection inspired by wood and handmade in Britain. The first thing visitors notice the moment they walk through the door is 'the wonderful smell'. It's beeswax on wood and they are in for a real treat. The passion is obvious; it's been shared in the family run business since 1978.

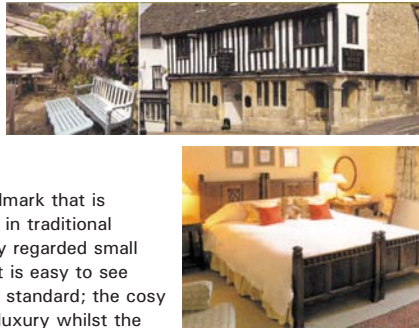
Wood is a natural medium, incredibly versatile and within every variety each piece is different. The work chosen by Jayne and Robert Lewin highlights the inventiveness and expertise of the designer-craftsmen. Robert is a furniture designer-maker and like the other makers understands and combines woods' beauty and tactile quality with individuality, good design and a superb standard of craftsmanship to achieve the best.

Visitors enjoy a fascinating and wide range including pieces for home interiors and studies, kitchenware, furniture, boxes, jewellery, decorative carving and turning, toys and a great selection of cards! Whether choosing practical essentials, gifts or indulging in treats, they love the touch and warmth only wood can give.



BURFORD HOUSE

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e-mail: stay@burfordhouse.co.uk
website: www.burfordhouse.co.uk



Located on the high street is the unmistakable landmark that is **Burford House**. This striking 17th century building in traditional Cotswold stone has become one of the most highly regarded small hotels in the area and stepping through the doors it is easy to see why. Burford House is furnished to an exceptional standard; the cosy sitting room with its log fire screams comfort and luxury whilst the elegant and light dining room gives a glimmer of the tempting dishes that are served there. Breakfast and light lunches are served from Monday to Saturday and dinner is available on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings.

Each of the eight bedrooms are decorated and furnished individually using the finest materials. Enjoy the luxury of the Egyptian bed linen whilst watching the flat screen television or relax in the large tubs in the en-suite bathrooms before slipping into the complimentary robes. All the rooms have wireless broadband access, books, mineral water and hospitality trays provided to add to the guests comfort.

The beautiful Wysteria clad courtyard is the perfect place to sample a drink from the well stocked bar that includes some rare single malts and a fine range of wines.

Burford House is the ideal place to pamper oneself whilst enjoying all this lovely area has to offer.

the church has been added to over the centuries and there are several interesting monuments and plaques to be found. In the south wall of the tower stair is a carved panel, dated around AD100, which is thought to show the Celtic fertility goddess Epona, with two male supporters and a horse. In the nave north aisle a monument erected to Edmund Harman, the barber-surgeon to Henry VIII, shows North American natives – possibly the first representation of native Americans in the country. In the south porch is a small plaque that commemorates three Leveller mutineers who were imprisoned in the church by Cromwell's men and shot in the churchyard in 1649.

The Levellers were troops from Cromwell's army who mutinied against what they saw as the drift towards the authoritarian rule they had been fighting against. While they were

encamped at Burford, the Levellers were taken by surprise by Cromwell's forces. After a brief fight, some 340 prisoners were taken and placed under guard in the church. The next day a court martial was held and three of the rebels were shot as an example to the rest, who were made to watch the executions. They were spared similar punishment when their leader recanted in a sermon.

The town's old court house, built in the 16th century with an open ground floor and a half-timbered first floor, is now home to the **Tolsey Museum**. An interesting building in its own right, its displays cover the history of the town and the surrounding area. Other buildings worth seeking out include the 16th-century Falkland Hall, the home of a local wool and cloth merchant Edmund Sylvester, and Symon Wysdom's Cottages, which were built in 1572 by another of the town's

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important merchants.

The 160 acres of park and garden that make up **The Cotswold Wildlife Park** are home to a whole host of animals, many of whom roam freely in the wooded estate. Rhinos, zebras, ostriches and tigers are just some of the animals in the spacious enclosures, while tropical birds, monkeys, reptiles and butterflies are all given the chance to enjoy the warmth of their natural habitat by staying indoors. With an adventure playground and a narrow-gauge railway, the park has something to offer all the family. Open every day from 10am.

Around Burford

TAYNTON

1.5 miles NW of Burford off the A424

Up until the end of the 19th century, Taynton was a quarrying village. The limestone taken from the quarries was used in the construction of Blenheim Palace, Windsor Castle and St Paul's Cathedral, as well as many Oxford colleges and local buildings.

CHASTLETON

10 miles N of Burford off the A44



Chastleton House

Chastleton is home to one of the best examples of Jacobean architecture in the country. In 1602, Robert Catesby, one of the Gunpowder Plot conspirators, sold his estate here to a prosperous wool merchant from Witney, Walter Jones. A couple of years later, Jones pulled down the house and built **Chastleton House**, a splendid Jacobean manor house with a dramatic five-gabled front and a garden where the original rules of croquet were established in 1865 – it features Jacobean topiary and a long-established vegetable plot. Until it became a National Trust property, Chastleton had been inhabited by the same family for more than 400 years. They became increasingly impoverished over the years and were unable to upgrade or update the property or its fixtures and fittings. By the time the National Trust acquired the house in 1991, it had become a virtual time capsule. For the first time in its history, the Trust decided to keep the house 'as found' rather than restore it to its former state of grace (the kitchen ceiling has not been cleaned since 1612!). One of the finest and most complete Jacobean houses in England, it is filled with a remarkable collection of

furniture, textiles and items both rare and everyday. Visits by appointment only.

SWINBROOK


2 miles E of Burford off the A40

The Fettiplace family lived in a great manor house in this peaceful village in the valley of the Windrush. The manor has long gone, but the family is remembered in several impressive and highly distinctive monuments in the Church of St Mary. The family home

of the Redesdales was also at Swinbrook, and in the churchyard are the graves of three of the six Mitford sisters, who were the daughters of the 2nd Baron Redesdale. Nancy, Unity and Pamela are buried here.

MINSTER LOVELL

4.5 miles E of Burford off the B4047

 Minster Lovell Hall

One of the prettiest villages along the banks of the River Windrush, Minster Lovell is home to the ruins of a once impressive 15th-century manor house. **Minster Lovell Hall** was built in the 1430s and was, in its day, one of the great aristocratic houses of Oxfordshire, the home of the Lovell family. However, one of the family was a prominent Yorkist during the Wars of the Roses. After the defeat of Richard III at Bosworth Field, he lost his lands to the Crown. The house was purchased by the Coke family in 1602, but around the middle of the 18th century the hall was dismantled by Thomas Coke, Earl of Leicester, and the ruins became lowly farm buildings. They were rescued from complete disintegration by the Ministry of Works in the 1930s and are now in the care of English Heritage. What is left of the house is




Minster Lovell Hall

extremely picturesque, and it is hard to imagine a better setting than here, beside the River Windrush. One fascinating feature of the manor house that has survived, is the medieval dovecote, complete with nesting boxes, which provided pigeons for the table in a way reminiscent of modern battery hen houses.

SHIPTON-UNDER-WYCHWOOD

4 miles NE of Burford on the A361

 Shipton Court  Wychwood Forest

The suffix under-Wychwood derives from the ancient royal hunting forest, **Wychwood Forest**, the remains of which lie to the east of the village. The name has nothing to do with witches – wych refers to the Hwicce, a Celtic tribe of whose territory the forest originally formed a part in the 7th century. Though cleared during the Middle Ages, it was still used as a royal hunting forest until the mid-1600s. By the late 1700s there was little good wood left and the forest was cleared to provide arable land.

The forest was one of the alleged haunts of Matthew Arnold's scholar gypsy. In the poem, published in 1853, Arnold tells the legend of the brilliant but poor Oxford

scholar who, despairing of ever making his way in the world, went to live with the gypsies to learn from their way of life.

The village itself is centred around its large green, which is dominated by the tall spire of 11th-century St Mary's Church. On the green, a pyramidal memorial commemorates the 17 men, women and children of Shipton who lost their lives in the wreck of the *Cospatrick* in 1874, while on their way to a new life in

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New Zealand. Here, too, can be found The Shaven Crown, now a hotel, which was built in the 15th century as a guest house for visitors to the nearby (and now demolished) Bruern Abbey. Finally, there is the superb **Shipton Court** (private) built around 1603, which is one of the country's largest Jacobean houses. It can be seen from the main road.

CHIPPING NORTON

10 miles NE of Burford on the A44

 Church of St Mary  Bliss Tweed Mill

 Museum

The highest town in Oxfordshire, at 650 feet above sea level, Chipping Norton was once an important centre of the wool trade. King John granted the town a charter to hold a fair to sell wool. This was later changed to a Mop Fair and the tradition continues to this day when the fair is held every September.

The town's medieval prosperity can be seen in the fine and spacious **Church of St Mary**, which was built in 1485 with money given by John Ashfield, a wool merchant. The splendid east window came from the Abbey of Bruern, a few miles to the southwest, which was demolished in 1535 following the Dissolution of the Monasteries. In 1549, the minister here, the Rev Henry Joyce, was charged with high treason and hanged from the then tower because he refused to use the new prayer book introduced by Edward VI.

Still very much a market town – the market is held on Wednesdays - Chipping Norton has been little affected by the influx of visitors who come to see this charming place.

Chipping Norton Museum is an excellent place to start any exploration and the permanent displays here cover local history from prehistoric and Roman times through to

THE CHEQUERS

Goddards Lane, Chipping Norton, Oxon OX7 5NP

Tel: 01608 644717

e-mail: info@chequers-pub.com

website: www.chequers-pub.com

The Chequers was built in medieval times at the entrance to the market place in Chipping Norton and is thought to date back to the late 1500s as a pub, when it was identified by a sign of a blue anchor outside. The name appears to have changed from The Anchor to The Chequers in 1794/5. Next door is the famous Chipping Norton Theatre, which attracts theatre-goers from all over the country for its performances and annual pantomime.

The Chequers is well liked for its cosy ambience. There are no juke boxes of gaming machines, so the rooms are filled with conversation and laughter. An open fire is a real treat during the winter or after a long walk or shopping trip.

The pub is divided into four seating areas in the bar. To the rear is a conservatory restaurant and converted barn. The pub serves up to six real ales, which always includes the main Fullers range.

The kitchen serves pub classics and modern British food and is renowned for its pies and Sunday roasts. The pub and restaurant are often busy with food orders, so it's worthwhile phoning to book in advance.





THE PERSIAN SHOP AND ART GALLERY

18 New Street, Chipping Norton,
Oxon OX7 5LJ
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e-mail: art@thepersianshop.co.uk

website: www.thepersianshop.co.uk

A beautiful selection of handpicked rugs, handicraft and artwork is available at **The Persian Shop and Art Gallery**. Located in a grade two listed building in Chipping Norton, the highest town in Oxfordshire, The Persian Shop is extremely popular with locals and visitors to the area.

The town was once an important centre of the wool trade and continues to hold markets every Wednesday. The Persian Shop is one of the more individual shops in the town and everybody who comes through the door is greeted with a warm welcome. The building dates back to 1820 and it has retained plenty of character and charm from that by-gone era.

The products on sale here are very varied and all are handpicked by Sakine Khosravi who was born close to Persepolis, the capital of the Ancient Persian Empire. There is a fine range of rugs from the main weaving centres of Iran including Tabriz, Qom, Esfahan, Nain, Bijar, Kashan, Mashad, Baluchi, Bahktiari, Shiraz and Yalameh. Handicraft from Esfahan such as exquisite enamelware and luxurious block-printed cotton are also available. The jewellery and pottery displayed on the shelves make fantastic gifts for friends or relatives and such is the choice at this independent shop it would be hard not to find something you like.

The Persian Shop is also home to an art gallery, which displays work by local artists as well as artists of international repute from along the silk route. Many people come here to browse the gallery and exhibitions are held frequently. Recently, works by De Benedictis, Rusconi, Morosini and Tosi have been displayed. Ring for details or check website.

The Persian Shop and Art Gallery is open from 10am until 5pm from Monday through to Saturday. It is closed on Sundays and Tuesdays. Access for disabled customers is not a problem with a ramp leading to the entrance.



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the present day, with topics including farming equipment, local industries, Chipping Norton at War, the local baseball club and Law and Order in Chipping Norton. Open Monday to Saturday afternoons Easter to October.

Found just to the west of the town is **Bliss Tweed Mill**, an extraordinary sight in this area as it was designed by a Lancashire architect, George Woodhouse, in 1872 in the Versailles style. With a decorated parapet and a tall chimney, which acts as a local landmark, this very northern-looking mill only ceased operation in the 1980s. It has since been converted into luxury apartments.

LITTLE ROLLRIGHT

13 miles NE of Burford off the A3400

 Rollright Stones

To the northwest of Over Norton are the **Rollright Stones** – one of the most fascinating Bronze Age monuments in the



Whispering Knights

country. These great gnarled slabs of stone stand on a ridge that offers fine views of the surrounding countryside. They all have nicknames: the **King's Men** form a circle; the **King Stone** is to the north of the circle; and, a quarter of a mile to the west, stand the **Whispering Knights**, which are, in fact, the remnants of a megalithic tomb. Naturally, there are many local legends connected with the stones and some say that they are the petrified figures of a forgotten king and his men that were turned to stone by a witch.